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MEET the AUTHORS

PRESENTING THE AUTHOR OF "JEWEL OF DEATH"

Chester S. Geier

WHEN not inquiring as to what I do for a living, or as to where I get my plots, people frequently ask me how I happened to become a writer. To tell the truth, I don't know exactly myself. The truly momentous decisions of our lives are those formed quite suddenly, in a flashing moment of inspiration. I do know, however, that I possessed a temperamental and intellectual background which made more or less inevitable ready inclination toward writing as a career.

For one thing, I've always had vague creative urgings. There was a period when I quite seriously considered commercial art as a likely field. For another, I've been a very heavy reader, especially of the brand of fiction known as science and fantasy, since the age of 12, when Fate gave me a kick in the pants in the form of an attack of spinal meningitis which left me permanently and totally deaf. Along with all this reading, I must unconsciously have absorbed some of the know-how of writing, which in combination with what I shall vainly call my natural creative talents, left a gap requiring only a chance action or remark to bridge.

As nearly as I can recall, such a stimulus was furnished by an introduction in my last year of high school to William Lawrence Hamling, then the editor of the school magazine. I learned that Bill wrote stories. What process of idea-association followed, I don't know, but the next thing I remember is that I was feverishly scribbling atrocious yarns of my own, and that Bill and I had become firm friends.

I was 18 then. A lot of time—according to my relative viewpoint—has passed. Time which, curiously enough, I measure not in months or years, but in story acceptances and rejections. There are some professions that get into the blood and bones of a man, so that he does all his living and breathing in its atmosphere and all his thinking and dreaming in its terms. Fantasy writing seems to be even more applicable to this condition.

My life for the past six years has been a sort of crazy-quilt, patchwork affair. Upon graduation from high school, I won a four-year scholarship to the University of Chicago. I stuck it out for only two years, and this because I wrote science-fiction and carried on various fan activities at times when I should have been studying. When schooling interfered with that, the schooling went by the board.

Following this, I held a variety of jobs. I've been successively a drill press operator, assembler, billing clerk, order checker, stock clerk, and expediter of war materials for a shipping firm. Like most people bent on writing as a career, I've never considered jobs very seriously. To me they always meant little more than temporary stop-gaps between periods of full-time writing. I'd work a little, save a little, write a little, and then start all over again.

Somewhat over a year ago, Bill Hamling and I opened up a writing office on Chicago's North Side. Bill had then recently been retired as a lieutenant of infantry in the army as the result of a little argument with a land mine, in which he came out second best. We set out to take the editors by storm, concentrating our attacks mainly on the venerable Rap, whose defenses despite his age were slowly and with difficulty beaten down. Rap—or Ray Palmer, to the uninitiated—is a good sport, though, and knows when he's licked. He began buying. He's still doing so, I might mention. Neither Bill nor myself knows why, but that fact alone is sufficient.

Bill and I still have the office. It would make interesting reading, I suppose, to say that a furious rivalry exists between us, or that we steal each other's plots, or that we constantly play clever jokes on one another. But the disappointing truth is that we're both much too staid to do more than get into an occasional mild argument over some writing technicality or twist of plot.

I'm 24 now; 6′ 4″ tall, and weight around 160 pounds more or less—usually less—which gives me somewhat the general appearance of a broomstick handle; gray-green eyes, brown hair, nicotine-stained complexion; and married. My better half, a freckle-faced Irish lass with mischievous green eyes, serves as my inspiration, in a purely financial way, for the yarns I now write. Further inspiration—also purely financial—is shortly due to be forthcoming.

As to what I do when not writing . . . well, I read science-fiction, putter around the house, bowl, and play an occasional game of poker. I do the latter with even less skill than the former. What keeps me going is the knowledge that there's always room for improvement.

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Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THE lifting of paper restrictions has enabled us to place FANTASTIC ADVENTURES on a bi-monthly basis instead of quarterly. There seems to be enough paper, but printers is another matter, so it may be some months before we can resume monthly publication. However, we assure our readers that they will receive the kind of magazine we had before the war, and in even larger format, just as soon as peacetime conversion allows.

AS A CELEBRATION of our increase in frequency of appearance, we are dragging one of Don Wilcox's fine stories out of hiding, and giving it to you in the firm conviction that you'll find it one of his very good efforts. It is "The Serpent Has Five Fangs," and you'll find it an unusual tale indeed.

MILES SHELTON presents "Woman's Island," which we believe is a quite unique fantasy. Miles hasn't been with us for a long time, and we welcome him back—especially since the story is one of his best. And being illustrated by Frank R. Paul is another event!

"MISTER ANONYMOUS" is a beautiful piece of work by the late David Wright O'Brien, and is one of the few remaining manuscripts still in our files by him. Every time we include one of these manuscripts, we stop to stare at it and think that not so long ago Dave himself typed these words, and it gets just a little hard to see them clearly. This particular story might have been just a little prophetic, but artist Magarian recently told us of a weird experience a friend of his had—wherein "Mister Anonymous" actually paid a visit to the friend's dying father, who saw him clearly. Who knows, maybe Dave knew there was a little guy like this?

GEOFF St. REYNARD is a new name to you, and to us—but his story, "Wink Van Ripple" is certain proof that he'll be back in the future. The boy can write, and we predict he'll be turning out more of the same before very long.

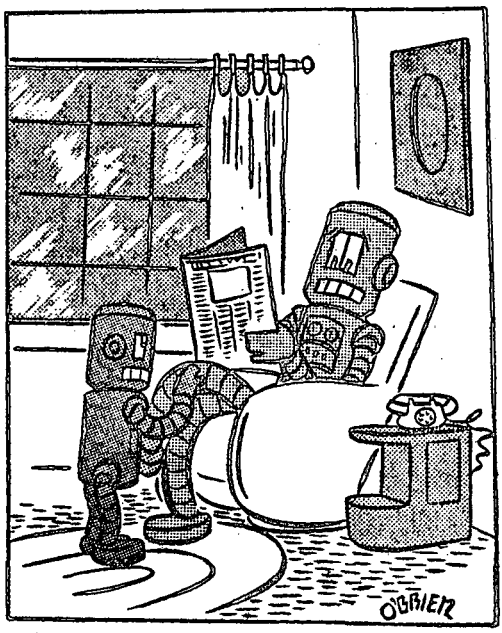
"A PROBLEM IN LUMBERING" is William Lawrence Hamling's latest effort, and it has to do with a certain mythical northwoods character and his famous blue bull. You'll find the pair cutting a lot of wood in this one, and cutting a lot of capers that are good for laughs.

MAYBE because Hamling and Chester S. Geier work together in the same office, the fact that both have a story in this issue isn't significant. Anyway, "Jewel of Death" is a new type of fantasy for Chet, and he did very well with it. Also, we introduce a new artist, Enoch Sharp, whom we think you'll like.

"THE SAPPHIRE ENCHANTRESS" is the kind of a story we like to get for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and Cleo Eldon first-times in a very convincing manner.

LEROY YERXA'S "The Story Escapes Me" is about an author who can't quite handle his characters, and they begin to handle him. Not a new idea, but a very nice treatment of it.

LEE FRANCIS winds up the issue with "Tears for the Crocodile," on of those weird yarns that is always coming out of Africa. In this respect, Africa is still the "dark continent." And with that, we'll say "see you soon!"—*Rap.*



"Pop, do you believe in people?"

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THE SERPENT HAS FIVE FANGS
(Novelet—17,500) ..... By Don Wilcox 6
Illustrated by Arnold Kohn & Robert Fuqua
How could anyone guess what would happen because of the death of a witch doctor on a mountain trail?

JEWEL OF DEATH (Short—5,400) .... By Chester S. Geier 36
Illustrated by Enoch Sharp
There was an eerie power in this jewel—the power of death, but there was also the power of justice!

WOMAN'S ISLAND
(Novelet—19,500) ..... By Miles Shelton 46
Illustrated by Frank R. Paul
Man was only a worm on this island, where a woman ruled as no human despot has ever ruled a people!

THE SAPPHIRE ENCHANTRESS
(Novelet—12,000) ..... By Cleo Eldon 84
Illustrated by H. W. McCauley
A weird light came from the ring. What did it mean? Was it some dangerous, unknown radioactivity?

MISTER ANONYMOUS
(Novelet—11,000) ..... By David Wright O'Brien 108
Illustrated by Rod Ruth
He was just a little guy in a plug hat, but he seemed to know what he wanted—so he hung around . . .

WINK VAN RIPPLE (Short—5,100) .... By Geoff St. Reynard 128
Illustrated by J. Allen St. John
Yes, the dwarfs still bowl in the Catskills! If you don't believe it, pay them a visit sometime.

A PROBLEM IN LUMBERING
(Short—4,400) ..... By William Lawrence Hamling 140
Illustrated by J. Allen St. John
How could the contract be fulfilled? It was beyond the power of one man to cut down such a forest!

THE STORY ESCAPES ME
(Short—9,500) ..... By Leroy Yerxa 148
Illustrated by Rod Ruth
There on the street was attempted murder—but the characters were imaginary! Or were they . . .?

TEARS FOR THE CROCODILE
(Short—4,800) ..... By Lee Francis 166
Illustrated by Robert Fuqua
Strange things happen in Africa; but could it be true that this lovely girl wasn't human at all?

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Front cover painting by Paul Lehman, illustrating a scene from "The Serpent Has Five Fangs."
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul, illustrating "Stories of the Stars"

DECEMBER 1945

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THE SERPENT HAS FIVE FANGS

I fired three shots to make him jump; then straight at his body

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By DON WILCOX

Here, high in the hills, were weird men of magic—and also a strange serpent that had five fangs, each of which could sting.

I SLEW this wandering medicine man in self-defense. If Sandra and I could have dodged his arrows, he might have lived. But the mountain path was narrow. We were caught in the line of death.

It all happened so quickly. We came upon him unexpectedly. He was alone—a picturesque figure in black plumes, mask, animal skins as brown as his body, and white bone ornaments. He had stopped by the path to rest. At the sight of us he leaped to his feet.

"He's scared, too, John," Sandra said. "Maybe you can soothe him."

"Maybe," I said, "if he doesn't start soothing us with those deadly arrows."

I started toward him. I didn't realize, then, that he was a man of magic. And of course he didn't know what we were; no such creatures as Americans had ever crossed his path before.

His wits failed him. Instead of attacking us with magic, he grabbed his bow. I kept moving toward him. I was about twenty yards away, when—

Zing! . . . Zing! . . . Zing! . . .

The arrows came thick and fast. We jumped for the cover of tree trunks.

Zing! A wisp of Sandra's dark red hair jumped. She stifled a scream. And that was when I lost my temper and opened up with my pistol.

I fired three shots to make the ground jump before his feet. Meaningless to him. He didn't know enough to take warning. I had to give him the real McCoy. Straight at his body.

Crack!

One of the rib ornaments of his

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breastplate popped into two dangling halves. Red blood oozed from between them. His bow slipped from his hands. The released arrow slithered harmlessly along the ground. He fell forward, yelping, staggering like a wounded antelope. Kerthump! As he rolled to the edge of the path, Death rolled with him.

"Clean through the heart!" Sandra ran forward and tackled him by the knees before he could tumble down the steep embankment of green jungle. "I've got him, John. Look out for the blood."

"Nice tackle, partner." I plugged the bullet hole with something from the first aid kit. I tried not to appear excited. Actually my heart was knocking. I picked him up in my arms.

"What are you going to do with him, John?"

"Remove him from this path," I said. "This is a heavy-duty highway for these parts. The next man who comes this way might be a cousin to this old boy. And then what happens to our plan to make the Wednesday Clipper?"

Sandra kicked dust over the blood that was spilt on the path. Then, catching up with me, she took a curious interest in the costume of my victim.

"When I get back home," she said, "that native dance ensemble I traded for is going to make a hit with our friends. Now if *you* had some native clothes too—"

"Keep a sharp lookout," I said. "I thought I heard some voices down that valley."

"If you weren't so dignified," said Sandra, "I know a way that we could by-pass all those dangerous Kazzwarts between here and the coast that Parroko was telling us about."

"What's your scheme?"

"I dress in my savage dance clothes, and you put on this man's skins and feathers. We could move past the village incognito."

"With our white arms and knees? You're being funny."

"We could stain ourselves with wild grapes, and nobody could tell from a distance. . . ."

WITH this suggestion, my adventurous young wife gave me a quick smile, a mixture of challenge and mischief. I could just see her telling our college friends all about it. If she realized the seriousness of the thing I had done, she didn't show it. But there's nothing faint-hearted about Sandra. If there had been, we'd never have brought ourselves to this jungle —against the advice of a prominent ethnologist who happens to be her father.

"Do you have the recordings?" I called to her as I led the way up the slope that overhung the path.

"I've got everything," she said. "Where you lead, I follow. But whither bound, my one-notch hero?"

"We're going up into the thicket long enough to remove this bird's Sunday suit. I'm going to make a change."

"Me too?"

"You too. And we'll give ourselves a couple coats of grape-stain—if you'll promise not to mistake me for our friend Parroko."

"Parroko was handsome," Sandra cracked. "You'll just be John to me."

"Just John, the dignified director of musical research among the primitives," I sighed.

"No," Sandra straightened with a hint of serious pride. "John with the nerve to shoot when the arrows start flying. John with one notch in his gun. John that will be a hero when he gets back—"

"Go gather some grapes, Sandra. We've no time to lose."

I removed the white mask from the

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dead native's face and proceeded to undress him. His costume was something, all right. The sort of thing museums go in for.

I wished we might have collected his bows and arrows while we were at it. But our job was to travel light. In the past five hours of swift hiking we'd had to cast off all the surplus baggage; for we were returning by a shortcut.

Our interest in primitive music had brought us to this bit of South Pacific jungle. Now, after three days in a bamboo village to the east of this mountain pass, we were returning with nothing but the priceless treasure we had come for: twenty-five recordings. Two-stringed lutes, weird voices, unbelievable rhythms, and the strangest harmonies from five-holed flutes — these would find their way into the Library of Congress, *we hoped.*

A delayed boat had abbreviated our visit. As a result we had done a hit and run. We had hit up a friendship with the east villages long enough to get our recordings. We had run as soon as some of the deadly Hazzwarts, from this side of the mountain, had appeared on the scene to make trouble for the east villagers.

COMING west, then, we were taking our chances. No guide would have advised this shortcut. Parroko, the one friendly Hazzwart we had contacted, told us it was risky. But we knew there was no other way to make the clipper port by Wednesday, two days hence.

Our recording equipment? We had had to walk off from it—hundreds of dollars worth of it. But this compact package of discs was the thing. To get back with it I would even throw away my clothes, don a native costume, and paint my skin with grape juice.

Sandra came running back to me with a few bunches of grapes in her hands.

"Natives coming up from the valley, John. You don't suppose they heard your shots?"

"It's possible."

"You don't think they saw us? They're only a half mile——"

"We'd better hurry—wait! Load up everything and we'll move farther on. Away from the path——"

"To the grapes—I saw some up the slope—this way."

We left the naked corpse in the thicket. With every effort to leave no foottracks, we clambered upward over rocks and roots to a place out of sight of the path, where the wild grapes were plentiful.

"Aren't you going to change, Sandra?"

For a moment she didn't answer. She was examining the white mask and the black plumed headdress. A look of alarm lighted her face. She took a pamphlet from her pocket—something her father had written about the manners, customs, and language of this section of the world.

"John!"

"What's the matter?"

"This man you've killed."

"What about him?"

"I think he's a *Kisqv.*"

"Well, whatever he is, he'll stay dead."

"But he's a Kisqv, John, a Kisqv!"

CHAPTER II

I Turn "Kisqv."

IT SEEMED to me I had read about it somewhere. Maybe in one of Sandra's father's books on ethnology. The word had a familiar ring—no, not ring. You can's make a word like "Kisqv" ring. My interest in music and

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musical words is probably the very reason I *hadn't* remembered this word.

"What, my dear, is a Kisqv?" I had trouble saying it. You have to say "Kiss" and sneeze like a baby kitten at the same time.

"A Kisqv is a wandering medicine man. He moves from one Hazzwart tribe to another and everyone honors him. He always has a wonderful reputation for magic."

"Do they honor him for the magic—or the reputation?"

"That's beside the point, my dear. You know you can't discredit magic if the whole tribe believes in it . . . Oh, John!"

Sandra looked a bit terrified, and yet a little proud, as I dressed myself in these spectacular g a r m e n t s. The breeches were complete with pockets and belts for weapons. The furry anklets tickled my shins halfway to my knees. I fastened the broken parts of the ribbed ornaments and hung the weight over my chest, though I must say I didn't feel much safer from arrows than before.

Before donning the mask and the headdress, I went to work applying grape coloring to the exposed parts of my body.

Again we could hear the voices of the chattering Hazzwarts, somewhat nearer than before, and we suddenly remembered the Kisqv's bow and the arrow or two that had been left in the path. Sandra said she would run down and get them while there was still time.

"Take my pistol," I insisted. "And hurry."

This white goatskin mask I placed over my face was an evil smelling thing, but comfortably soft against my face; the cord around the back of my head was a perfect fit. My Caucasian features were thus well concealed. So was my short, crisp blonde hair, as soon as I donned the black plumes. *What a curious warmth from the colored band of this headdress as I snugged it down over my forehead.*

I LOOKED at myself in my pocket mirror, and I continued to apply the grape stains to my face, neck, arms, and hands, until I was as deeply pigmented, apparently, as the jungle natives.

Why didn't Sandra return?

Did I dare call to her? I was on the verge of doing so when I heard voices talking to her from only a few yards away. Not voices from the approaching party, but from the other direction. They were calling her *by name*. Then I knew. They were the tall handsome warrior, Parroko, and his beautiful smiling wife—the friends we had become acquainted with on the trail a few hours before, who had favored us with food and water and had warned us of the cruelties of their own people to the west.

I could understand Parroko's simple Hazzwart expressions, now, as I overheard him talking with Sandra:

"What? . . . Have we overtaken you so soon? How slowly you must travel . . . As we told you, tribal business brings us to the village on this day . . . But where is your husband?"

I almost called an answer before I thought. But Sandra was on her wits.

"He has gone on ahead."

Parroko's wife exclaimed with dismay. "What? And left you to pass through the dangerous village alone? I myself would not think of it, yet I am a Hazzwart."

Parroko commented sharply, "That, my wife, is because the King himself has his eyes on you. Indeed you would not be safe. It is my prayer that when a Kisqv comes this way he will warn the King to forget you."

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These were disturbing words. Sandra might have asked all about this trouble if her mind hadn't been knotted with troubles of her own. I knew she was trying to convey her warning to me, speaking loudly enough that her words would carry, making sure that I wouldn't walk out of concealment in my Kisqv disguise.

"John and I thought it best for him to hurry on to our destination," she was saying. "He could make so much better time alone. He'll be able to hold the sky ship until I get there."

Yes, I could see that she was right in keeping me out of the picture. It wouldn't do to let anyone know I had just shot a Kisqv, much less that I had committed the sacrilege of stealing his clothes with the intention of panning myself off as a Kisqv myself.

"But aren't you at all frightened?" Parroko's beauty asked in her soft, smiling voice.

"I have a song that I sing to keep from being frightened." And Sandra began to sing, making up the words and melody, in a language they couldn't understand—perfectly good English to me. The song went:

"Husband, dear, are you hearing me? I can't go native with you now. These friends have me. You know I will be safe with them, but you must either change back or stay out of their sight. Play safe, dear. I'll gather up the things. You may follow.

They hushed her song.

"The village folk are coming up the path," said Parroko. "They must have passed your husband."

"I am sure he dodged them."

"Look!" said Parroko's beauty. "They bear an honor seat. They must expect a Kisqv.'

OF THE fifteen or twenty villagers coming over the rise, four husky men were carrying a sort of portable throne fastened between two long poles; but no one was riding in it—yet.

I would have succeeded in getting back to the wild grapes and my packages if three or four youngsters hadn't been chasing along above the trail, just a good stone's throw away from the rest of the party. I didn't hear them until they were literally upon me.

"The Kisqv! The Kisqv!" they cried. "Here he is."

I must have reached for my pistol automatically. But Sandra had the pistol. I had nothing—well, almost nothing. I remember discovering a folded piece of parchment. But no gun, no knife, nothing that was any comfort.

"Don't kill me," one of the native men called. "Not me!"

"Spare me!" a native woman wailed. "I am not the one."

"Not me! Not me!" A half dozen of these villagers were approaching me with the same plea.

What was this all about? Had my reputation for quick murders spread over this mountainside ahead of me? But that was impossible. This strange greeting was something that belonged to the rites of the Kisqv. It was my costume that was earning me all this respect.

"Take it easy," I whispered to myself. "To these people you're the sure-nuff article. They've made a god out of you on the spot. Righto, don't disappoint them. As for what you did with the real Kisqv, mum's the word."

The next thing I knew they had loaded me into the wooden car with a great show of doing me honors, at the same time shying around me as if I might take a notion any moment to punish one of them with Death.

Four husky natives, dressed in loin cloth and bone ornament, picked up the ends of the poles. Away I went for a

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free ride down the mountain trail.

"Jeepers," I said aloud, for I didn't mind talking to myself in English, "I wonder if Sandra sees what's happening to me."

My words had a marvelous effect upon the throng following. In their Hazzwart tongue they mumbled excitedly, "Listen to the Kisqv. He speaks words of magic."

CHAPTER III

A Piece of Parchment

"THE King and Queen will have you for dinner," I was informed by one of my bearers. "They are waiting now."

An ambiguous announcement like that doesn't exactly put you at your ease. But there wasn't any other way I could translate the Hazzwart words. The King and Queen were going to have me for dinner.

How? The way we used to have the preacher for dinner? Or the way cannibals would have a preacher for dinner? I could worry about things like that; especially when I recalled that eating a man is one way, among many primitives, of getting his strength. If a lion, a tiger, an enemy, or a missionary is fierce with courage, eat his heart to receive his fierceness.

Well, they needn't eat me for that reason. If it came to technicalities, I was one scared kitten. A few bites of roasted John Baxter would probably devitalize the tribal bravery for days to come.

"Could I stop and get a drink of water?" I asked.

"Water, indeed. We will bring you a drink as soon as we reach the village."

I was snatching at straws. I had some vague notions of breaking out of this jog-cart, I wasn't sure how. All those old cowboy stunts of leaping off horses or jumping for overhanging branches were no help in this situation. So they'd *bring* me water, would they? That wasn't the point. I wanted to get out and get water.

"I also desire to wash before I meet the King and Queen."

This suggestion caught on. Of course I should have the privilege. One noisy old native woman assured me she would be honored to have me stop at her place, right at the outskirts of the village.

"That will be a great favor," I said.

"Ah, but you can do me a great favor," she replied, now walking alongside my jog-wagon. "You will change my pig-son into the boy he used to be *—if I am deserving.*"

The pleading in her voice struck through me. I gathered that there had been foul play on the part of some predecessor of mine, and that I was supposed to undo the mischief. I got it from one of my bearers, the tall elderly fellow with the grizzled hair and the square bone carvings in his ears.

This tall, grizzled native, Safsaf by name, said, "She has cried many nights because one Kisqv changed her son into a pig a few seasons ago. Do you remember the case?"

"Er—changed her son *into a pig?*" I groped.

"You were not the one who did it," Safsaf said confidently; and I assured him I was not. Nevertheless he pressed a responsibility upon me. In his low, even voice there was a persuasive quality that carried weight against the noisy jabber of the throng around us. "All she wants," he said, "is that you make a wish for her."

"A wish? Certainly. No trouble at all."

"When we arrive at her house, then, wish for her that the pig will change

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back into her boy."

WE WERE passing under those overhanging boughs, now, and I was having to dodge all sorts of tropical vines and leaves. But that was nothing to the mental dodging I was doing. Within the warmth of the snug headdress the wishes were whirling. Mostly I was wishing that Sandra might be following close on the heels of this party, and that our friend Parroko might seize the first opportunity to bring me some word—

Ker-bump. One corner of my cart went down without warning. The little fat squint-eyed man on the rear right had let go and was now walking into a thicket where the wild grapes showed heavy on the vines.

"I knew I had been smelling grapes," he said, returning with a handsome bunch. "I have been hungry too long."

"You are always hungry," Safsaf said. "Pick up your corner."

As we jogged on, the man munched his grapes with gusto, and he repeated that his appetite was sharp and that he had been smelling grapes all the way down the trail.

"Jeepers!" I thought. "My skin-coloring." And I had visions of this hungry fat fellow tracing down my deception with his bloodhound talent. But five minutes later I forgot.

They helped me out of the cart and led me into the thatched hut, the first of a line of native houses. There were no steps. The bare ground was the floor. A few straw mats were lying around in the first room, and on one of them lay this slick little red pig.

"Oh, you poor little dear." The superstitious lady went right to it, knelt down on the floor and embraced it and made over it with loving talk. "This good Kisqv is going to make a wish. He has come to do you a favor, dear."

I was on the spot, all right. Wishing was the cheapest and easiest way out, so I wished aloud in the Hazzwart tongue. Then, to give the crowd the effect of magic words, I wished aloud in English, such as:

"It's a shame, old lady, that some cheap Kisqv has made you think this beast is something more than potential pork chops. All right, porker, be her son, and stop your infernal grunting."

With that done I went on into the rear room and helped myself to drinking water out of the gourd. It was then that I forgot. *I started to wash my face and neck.*

ONE stroke of my hand across my throat and I stopped. Safsaf was standing near, watching me. His was a deadly serious countenance. A savage can be very thoughtful at times. He can also hold his tongue.

Safsaf said nothing, but he must have seen me glance at the dark stain on my fingertips. I stopped at once.

"It is the wrong time to wash," I said. "At this season the moon lifts blackness from the sky as it sweeps across the heavens. The hoptoads leave a white path in black slime. The roots of trees tie knots at this season."

Safsaf stared wide-eyed at my words. Had my dodge gone over with him? I couldn't tell. But I knew darned well that from this minute on John Baxter Kisqv was going to have to be on his toes. One more slip and the white streak over my Adam's apple would be the dotted line for a knife.

We left the hut with the old woman still cuddling her sleek red pig, giving me the grateful eye as I passed. By George, the little beast had stopped grunting and was looking around as if he understood everything.

Most of the crowd had gone on ahead to the clearing in the center of the vil-

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lage. Now "Right-Rear," my fat and squint-eyed bearer with the incessant appetite, had strayed across to the scene of a barbecue, and two other bearers were sent after him. Finally Safsaf himself went to bring the three of them back.

Meanwhile, I made haste to translate the piece of parchment which the dead Kisqv had been carrying in his pocket. The writing was crude; but Sandra's father had practiced us in the arts of such translations. As nearly as it can be reproduced in the English, it read:

Who strikes this Kisqv strikes a five-fanged serpent.
Strike not lest five fates or fortunes be unleashed:

Lest a visitor lose his fears to a King,
Lest a King lose his covering to an Innocent,
Lest an Innocent lose his fate to a Serpent,
Lest a Serpent lose his form to a Queen,
Lest a Queen lose her queenly gift to a Visitor

who loses to a King
who loses to an Innocent
who loses to a Serpent
who loses to a Queen
who loses to a Visitor

to a K
to an I
to an S
to a Q
to a V

I read it over twice, just catching enough to make me dizzy. Then my four bearers returned. Right-Rear threw away the remainder of his ribs and smeared his greasy mouth on his arm. He and the other three picked me up in the jog-wagon and carted me over to the King's headquarters.

CHAPTER IV

The King's Hidden Purpose

THEY placed me on the high four-way throne—a wooden arch with steps that led up from either side. At the dizzy height of twenty feet I was made comfortable in a basket-work chair at the right of the King.

The Queen sat on his left; and on the other side of her was a chair for Safsaf, for he was the chief of the guards. Safsaf had numerous duties. The Queen was continually calling on him for some service, or complaining because he was not in his place when she wanted him. He came and went like a sergeant-at-arms running a small police force on the side.

But however much he came or went, Safsaf was keeping an eye on me. The more he watched, the more I sweat within my white mask, so that I had to touch my cheeks and neck occasionally with a handkerchief. I thought the King and Queen would have something to say about that. How on earth could I explain carrying a handkerchief? I must have been in recent contact with the civilized traders of the coast. Or was this a magic handkerchief of my own devising, with the ability to remove bits of a man's skin coloring? Each time I dabbed my throat the handkerchief took on another dark spot.

But presently a cool breeze struck our elevated platform and I grew more comfortable. In the meantime the King occupied himself with smoking his long-tubed oriental pipe. You'd have thought it was his only interest in life—as long as the Queen was around.

It was my good fortune that this King was not a suspicious fellow. He

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was a bulky, soggy, cheerless old codger with sad eyes and a drooping mouth. Only in that certain lift of his eyebrows when a new party of natives appeared in the distance did I detect a hint of his hidden nature. He was watching for someone—someone special.

He called to an attendant. "Has the warrior Parroko come to join the tribal assembly yet?"

"I will let you know if he comes, King," said the attendant.

The King puffed thoughtfully and said, "He should come. I would give him a chance to bargain for his own life." And again the sad-faced ruler raised his eyebrow a trifle, and the attendant nodded as if he understood.

The Queen began to scold. What was the matter with Parroko? What had he done to deserve punishment? Was he not the handsomest and strongest of the young warriors?

"If he does not attend this assembly," said the King, "I believe he is no longer faithful to the Hazzwart tribe. Already he lives too far away from the village, even beyond the mountain. I think he and his wife are too friendly with the villages to the east."

"She smiles too much," said the Queen.

"A smile would not hurt you," said the King.

"A Queen gets tired of smiling for a King so sour," she snapped. "Why don't they bring us food? . . . Safsaf, where are our dinners?"

"The dinners will come," said the King. "Safsaf, how many of the tribe have not yet arrived at the village? Have you counted?"

WITH all of this bickering and countermanding of orders going on about me, I began to understand that I was too much of a god to be concerned with all these earthly affairs. In the wide, sunlit clearing before us the villagers were continually passing. Families and larger groups were parking themselves in the lengthening shade around the edges, chattering and feasting, but at the same time keeping an eye on our elevated thrones to be ready for any ceremony that the King might start. But the King continued to watch the trails for late comers.

I watched too, wondering what would happen if Parroko and his beauty should appear with a white girl from America. Poor Sandra! What a chance I was taking, leaving her in the hands of comparative strangers.

An attendant brought trays of food. The King watched me struggle to get the small bites through the mouth of my mask. Then he went on quarreling with the Queen.

"Hisssss!" she would say, jerking her shoulders and making an evil face like an angry cat. He could argue with a pretty good line of reason, but she could always come back at him with that snake-like "Hisssss!"

I felt a gentle tap at my back. I looked around cautiously, thinking it might be Sandra or Parroko.

Two slender hairy hands were visible, reaching toward me over the rear edge of the elevated platform. I know a chimpanzee's hands when I see them. *These were chimp's.*

The King glanced back, shrugged and went on with his sullen quarrel. But Safsaf, catching sight of the chimp hands tapping me on the back, called a sharp order to the owner of the hands.

"Get down from there, Graspy!"

"I want to talk to the Kisqv," came the answer.

"You've no business up here."

"I want him to change my hands back to human hands," said Graspy. "I want him to wish—"

"Get away. You don't deserve a

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wish," said Safsar. "Your old hands were too handy about taking things that didn't belong to you. That's why a Kisqv gave you chimp hands, you know."

"But I will never steal again," the owner of the chimpanzee hands pleaded. He was a thin chested little man, one of the darkest of these purplish-brown natives, ragged and forlorn.

"Come here, Graspy," I said in my best Hazzwart articulation. "I want to talk with you."

With chimpanzee-like agility the skinny little man swung himself over the rail and sat down by the top step of the arch. Maybe this fellow was a bad actor, I warned myself; but here was a chance to grind an ax of my own.

I had to whisper to him, because the King and Queen were suddenly watching me with serious interest, and a few villagers were gathering in around the foot of the arch.

"Are you going to make a wish for me, Kisqv?" he asked.

"I am going to try you out to see how dependable you are," I whispered.

"Here is a message that I want you to deliver. Somewhere you will find Parroko and his party. There will be a white woman with the party. She will be able to read my message."

Then I scribbled a few lines on the only thing I could find to write on—the piece of parchment with the weird verse about the five-fanged serpent.

"Let me know where to find you as soon as darkness comes, Sandra," I wrote. "Better warn Parroko that the King expects him and intends to give him a chance to 'bargain for his life.' I have a hunch it's Parroko's wife, not life, that he intends to get."

Then I added a P.S. "Ye Gods, Sandra, don't ever play medicine man without any previous preparation. What magic words should I say to change this fellow's chimp claws to human hands? Yours in distress, John, the Kisqv."

Graspy took the folded note and scrambled down the side of the arch and was gone. I proceeded to feed myself through my mask, wondering, meanwhile, what this dopey, quarreling old king could say to justify his evil intentions against a fine upstanding warrior like Parroko.

CHAPTER V

Plans for a Ceremonial Murder

OF ALL the weird devices for achieving revenge against a personal enemy, this Hazzwart ritual took the cocoanut cake. It was a good thing that Safsaf refreshed my memory, or I might have walked into my part of the ceremony blind, so to speak—and there was still that guide line for a knife across my Adam's apple, in case my brand of magic suddenly became transparent.

The air of expectancy of the crowds began to bear down on me. One group after another finished feasting and moved in closer around the throne. The long shadows of evening came on. The Queen went down to join some of the tribal aristocracy. The attendants removed our dinner trays.

I could feel Safsaf's strong eyes on me. I gathered that it was soon going to be time for me to make a speech. Jeepers, what did they expect of me? Magic, no doubt. What I wouldn't have given for a sleight-of-hand outfit.

Safsaf said, "You Kisqvs travel so much from one tribe to another, I'm surprised you don't get our customs mixed. Do you find it easy to remember?"

"Very difficult," I said, trying hard to be casual.

"You do remember our customs, of

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course," said the King, puffing at his pipe.

"Oh, yes . . . yes, sort of." I frowned and stroked my chin thoughtfully. "I seem to remember—"

"Then prepare to kill my personal enemy by the snake ritual," said the King. "I will have the dances begin at once, then your ritual will follow."

I swallowed with a dry throat. "You mean there's someone you want killed tonight?"

"Isn't that what you expected?" Safsaf put in, giving me the cold glare. "The King has been looking forward to your visit—"

"Yes, I have," said the King, "for months and months."

"Ever since you laid eyes on Parroko's wife," said Safsaf pointedly.

"Yes, ever since I—ugh! Safsaf, you talk too much." The King puffed hard at his pipe for several minutes.

BETWEEN him and Safsaf I refreshed my memory on the ritual. It would be my job to bring together three materials, and the King seemed disturbed that I didn't already have everything at hand.

First, I must have a portion of the garment of the man who was to be the King's victim. And that man was, of course, Parroko. The King had thus far failed to learn of Parroko's whereabouts (and I might have added that I had had no luck either, for Graspy had never returned to me.)

Secondly, I must have a snake.

For the third item, I would need some strips of flesh from the body of a dead man.

"According to our custom, your magic death descends upon the victim whose garment you treat in the prescribed manner," said the King.

I wondered. Was it possible that this rigamarole, if practiced by a real Kisqv, would have any effect whatsoever?

"So you want me to take a piece of Parroko's garment," I said, "and stuff it down the throat of a serpent—"

"A dead serpent," Safsaf corrected, and I must say the detail relieved me more than I could tell.

"And then, as I recall, I must tie the serpent with the sinews of a dead man."

"And hang the serpent on the cliff—" said the King.

Safsaf cut in with his more accurate details, "From the highest branch of the highest tree on the great cliff above the village."

I looked to the north where the orange rock reared high in the setting sun. The tree was visible, a naked black trunk with very few branches. One could imagine it to be an ideal place to hang a serpent or a man.

The chills were doing relays through my spine. I studied the sluggish, drooping face of the King, and thought what a curious character he must be within his sullen mask. One would never guess that he burned with hot passions for the beautiful wife of Parroko. He went on puffing his pipe, and when the attendants passed beneath the throne he signalled to them to let the dancing begin.

"If Parroko came to you to bargain for his life," I said to the King, suddenly grasping for inspirations, "what chance would you give him?"

He puffed six long puffs, and I decided he didn't intend to answer me. So I tried another question.

"As a Kisqv, do I not have the right to ask why Parroko deserves punishment?"

"As a Kisqv, you have the right to ask," said Safsaf, answering for the King.

But the King said, "I have the right to answer—or refuse."

"Well?" I tried to bring pressure to

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bear. After all, maybe I wasn't too free with my magic. Maybe I would say, no reasonable explanation, no death miracles. I put it gently but firmly. "You may as well know that I *haven't* procured a snake. And I *haven't* brought any stripes of flesh from a dead man. And I *haven't* secured any scrap of Parroko's garment."

The King glowered with a more menacing eye than I had seen before—a far more convincing bluff than he had used on the Queen when they had quarreled.

"I will tell you my grievances against Parroko," he said sullenly, "and you will convince the tribe that he deserves death."

THERE were teeth in these words and in the gesture that accompanied them. The King lifted a long, dark-handled blade from its place of concealment in the front railing of the throne. It looked like a crude corn-knife, about twenty-five inches long and slightly curved. He handed this to Safsaf very solemnly.

"I have my own weapons," Safsaf said dryly, and returned the corn-knife to its socket. "Here comes Graspy. He will have something of interest for us."

The little man with the chimpanzee hands ascended the stairs directly to Safsaf and to him a four-inch strip of bright red cloth.

"Here is the goods you requested," said Graspy. "Now may I talk with the Kisqv again? Perhaps he will grant my wish and change my hands."

The poor guy, I did wish his hands could be changed back, if wishing could help. And I called across and asked him to come to my side, and the sympathy I felt for him gave me a strange warmth around my forehead within the band of my headdress.

I whispered to him, "What news from the white girl with Parroko and his wife?"

"I did not find a white girl," said Graspy.

"Then you must not have found Parroko," I said.

"I delivered your message," said Graspy. "Will you wish my hands to change?"

All this conversation had gone on in the most guarded whispers. But his evasive answers made me lose my temper.

"Then you did find Parroko—or didn't you?" My whisper was a bit too loud, and the King looked at us as if he needed to know whatever was being said about Parroko. The little man with the chimp hands was frightened and bluffed out. He swung over the rear rail and chased away before getting himself involved with any more questions.

I reasoned the matter out and tried to take an optimistic view: he must have found Parroko's party, because he had delivered the message, moreover, he's brought back a piece of Parroko's garment for the ceremony.

The King turned the bit of red cloth over in his hand. He was jealous. Warriors had no business getting so high-toned. Why should Parroko have any right to wear garments of such quality. Brilliant red should be reserved for the royalty.

"You were about to explain your grievances against Parroko," I reminded the King.

"Yes . . . yes. He makes very bad arrows. It spoils a hunt when the arrows won't shoot straight. I myself have tried some of his arrows. They won't hit anything. I have warned him to improve his ways. But he is incorrigible."

"That is a strange offense," I said. "Can Parroko shoot straight with his

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own arrows?"

"If he does, he must aim away from the target," said the King.

"If Parroko is handsome and strong and a good shot, what are the other tribesmen going to think if you have him killed? Will your own popularity not suffer?"

THE King's eyebrows gave a quick twitch. His fingers thumped nervously near the handle of the corn-knife. I sensed that he didn't relish this situation, that he had some private fears of his own; but he intended to go through with the job, to get what he wanted.

"The people can soon forgive a man who has a beautiful wife. If I come before them with a beautiful new Queen —er—after all, you and I have the power to force this decision down their throats. You are the Kisqv. I am the King. We'll force it down—heh! The snake. Where is your snake for the ceremony. Don't you have a snake? . . . Safsaf, the Kisqv needs a snake."

Safsaf rallied to the cause. He would send some tribesmen around to the mouth of the cave and they would kill a serpent before the twilight grew any dimmer.

"Kisqvs are most careless about their serpents. They should furnish their own," Safsaf said as he jogged down the steps. "Sometime I would like to see the Kisqv who would dare to use the great serpent that dwells in the third room of the cave."

The Queen, ascending the steps as Safsaf departed, picked up his words and hissed at them.

"Hsss! . . . Hsss! . . . Like as not, Safsaf himself is afraid of the great serpent in the third room. But I am not afraid," the Queen bragged. "I find it pleasant to talk with such a large and beautiful serpent. You understand, don't you, Kisqv?"

Did I understand? Well, if anyone ever talked like a snake it was this Queen. But I couldn't imagine a very pleasant conversation growing out of a lot of hisses.

The Queen was pressing a bluff in my direction. "*You* would enjoy talking with the serpent too. . . . Oh, yes you would, I'm sure. I've always wanted to be present when a Kisqv communicated with the source of his own magic. Shall we go to the cavern together tomorrow?"

The King tried to quiet her. I was busy gathering power for the ritual, he said, and I should not be disturbed.

"Do you have a piece of the victim's garment?" the Queen asked.

"I have it," I said.

"What about a dead snake?" she asked, as if it were her duty to check up on everything.

"Safsaf has gone for it."

"And what about sinews from the body of a dead man? The Queen searched my eyes. "The party who went out to meet you have reported that you did not kill any of them. So you must have brought strips of flesh from some other dead man." She sniffed. "I fail to smell dead flesh—or have you soaked it in grape wine?"

I rose to the occasion in a way that would have made Sandra proud.

"I killed a man just before the party met me," I said. "But in this season when the moon gathers blackness across the sky and the hoptoads leave white trails in the slime and the tree roots tie knots under the ground, I could not slice the flesh of this dead man until an hour after sunset. Call for me an attendant, and I will direct him to the spot above the trail where the dead body lies waiting to be sliced."

A few minutes later two attendants started off on a run, to get the desired materials before the dance ended. A

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chill struck me when I noticed that a third person fell in with them—the brawny, grizzled man with the square-cut bone ornaments in his ears—Safsaf. I could have bet my Clipper reservation that he wanted to find out whom I had killed.

CHAPTER VI

"With This Act I Do Destroy . . ."

THE snake was a brightly colored young python, cold to my hands.

There was enough of life left in its dead body to keep it twitching and writhing for a long time. What little grape stain there was left in my palms wore away rapidly.

The shine of its body, illuminated by the columns of ceremonial fire from either side of the arch, apparently delighted these natives. Their eyes shone bright and eager. I wondered if Parroko was somewhere among the dark shadows, looking on, dreading the fate that he believed this ceremony would bring down on his head.

Poor Parroko. His spirit of adventure had been his undoing. His strength and endurance had taken him on longer treks than most of the warriors endured. And so he had met the traders along the shore. He had become acquainted with a few of the east villages. He had met a few American and English business men or tourists. And he had chosen to live a long distance, in terms of a day's walk, from his original Hazzwart tribe.

He had thrived upon the advantages of many contacts, and I wondered, as I prepared to administer the ceremonial death to a bit of his garment, whether he would have believed these elaborate exercises could hurt him. Could magic words—such as the mystifying American language that I used—have any unfavorable psychological effects?

I walked down the steps slowly. I swayed rhythmically to the weird music. The snake's slow twisting and swinging from my arms contributed to the effect.

That music! If only I could have recorded that!

The seven tribal musicians were watching me closely, and it would seem that what they played was a perfect expression of jungle magic. As if the snake and I were calling out melodies to fit the mood.

And yet, the strangeness of the music was in reality effecting me. The slow thumping of leather-headed drums, the capricious fading in and out of flute passages in the most curious harmonies, like the rising and falling of winds in a lost cavern—these cast a spell upon me. I was the man of magic. *I was the man of magic.*

Magic power was mine because all those pairs of shining superstitious eyes *believed* I was a man of magic. And now as the warmth of the colored band of my headgear sent hot waves through my brain, as I saw the shadows of my tall black plumes dancing above my head, I was struck through with the sense of a wonderful power.

Could I, by this simple gesture, make Death descend upon an innocent man?

I SWEAR there was no murder in my heart in that strange hour. I swear that my respect for the brave, handsome Parroko and his beautiful wife had not diminished.

But I was caught in the enchantment of a whirlpool of magic—the burning expectations of superstitious people. And under the pressure of this spell, *I wanted to know!*

I wanted to know what I could do, how far my powers would reach, whether I had caught the secret—God forgive me—of a magic murder.

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As I moved into the throngs, they slowly widened the circle around me, standing, staring, waiting. Near enough that they could hear my voice, yet far enough back that I sensed their awe and fear. Within their circle I seemed to stand alone between the two ceremonial fires. But I was not alone. The young python was in my hands, still twitching, still mocking the Death that had claimed it.

I lifted the bit of red cloth from my pocket and held it aloft for all to see.

A wisp of smoke from one of the fires coiled down like a shadowy snake and seemed to catch the red cloth from my fingers. Whether the smoke held it there, or whether my hand did it, I cannot say.

My Hazzwart words were simple, but my voice was invested with an eloquence that held my audience spellbound. The dead snake, hanging, loosely from my left hand, ceased to twitch.

"This bit of cloth which floats here in the air—"

The rhythm of my words were echoed back to me in the melody of the primitive musicians.

"—shall symbolize the life of the one who wore this garment."

Again that strange echo of music like a repetition of my words. But more—a slight movement among the dancers, as if one of them was swaying her graceful body to the tune of my magic chant. She was a most attractive savage, scantily costumed.

She moved out into the circle slowly, as my speech continued. With each spoken phrase she waited, a beautifully molded statue; with each echo from the flutists she danced a little farther out into the circle. It would seem that she herself was the personification of the magic power I invited.

"This bit of cloth, then, is one life among you. . . . But I have power to judge where Death shall strike. . . . And so I find this life has stirred the enmity . . . of your own King. . . ."

I pressed the jaws of the young python between my thumb and forefinger and the dead mouth opened. I stood there, repeating my words in English, and even I felt the strangeness of the sounds no Hazzwart understood. The orchestra echoed the words, and again the graceful dancer lent her body to the theme of Death.

"I hold here in my hand a thing of Death," I went on. "And into its dead mouth I force this life."

With my right hand I drew the bit of cloth out of the coiling smoke above my head and inserted it in the snake's mouth. With a bit of stick I forced it deep down the throat. The dancer stood near me now, and with the echo of the music, she imitated these actions—first mine, then, in a grotesque contortion, that of the twisting snake receiving the red cloth down its throat.

Finally I said, "With this act I do destroy, for all time, the personal enemy of the noble King."

Orchestra and dancer emphasizing each motion of my hands, I proceeded to take the human sinews from my belt that had been delivered to me just before the ceremony began, and tied the python's tail and head together.

"And now, most noble King, I have performed," I said, "and if this loop of death, bound tight with death, is hung from the highest branch of the highest tree. . . ."

I broke off, for the dancer, coming very close, had whispered something to me—*in English!*

"Meet me on the trail, John, as soon as you can get away—on the cliff above the fork—"

The music was beating a swift, throbbing dance, and there was nothing for her to do but to dance away from me.

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I was a bit staggered. I tried to regain my balance and go on with my speech to the King. But the attendants hurried to me, took the looped snake from my hands, and raced away through the crowd to ascend the cliff.

As for the King, he wasn't listening to me. And he wasn't looking about for the wife of Parroko. His sad, soggy eyes were glued fast upon one person—the new dancing girl who had portrayed this Death ritual so effectively. His eyebrows lifted.

CHAPTER VII

The Kisqv Must Do the Deed

I LOST sight of Sandra in the shuffle. And no wonder. Her costume and make-up were so well done that if she were among a hundred shadowy natives a few yards away from the firelight she was simply one of them.

But she had dared to make herself conspicuous by that dance, and I feared she would find herself trapped if she didn't make a break for the trail at once.

For my own part, I couldn't make the break immediately. These magic-mongers had me. I was their god more than ever, after this successful ceremony. The instant it was over, scores of these superstitious jungle denizens were surrounding me with questions:

"Whose garment was it that the snake received?"

That was the first and most insistent question. And while I knew that the rumors had already run rife concerning the King's designs on Parroko's wife, still no one knew for certain that it was Parroko I had ceremonially destroyed.

"Tell me that it was not me," someone called over the heads of the throng. "I once had a red garment. But I have done nothing to deserve death."

"Was it Parroko?" someone else asked bluntly. "His wife is in a panic."

The dread uncertainty was a panic for several persons, whether beset by guilt because of a secret hatred of the King—or the Queen—or whether suspicious that any innocent person who possessed a red garment might have been the object of my destruction.

"Silence, you chattering birds," I commanded. "I will not tell you who the victim was. You may wait and see who shall die as the result of my ritual. Or—if you dare—you may go to the King with your questions. He may tell you who his personal enemy is, if he wishes. *But I will not tell.*"

This calmed them and earned the respect for me that I badly needed. But it didn't free me from the firelight huddle that had gathered around. The questions took on a new note. Persons who had waited in silence, hoping for a private word with me, now voiced their pleadings.

"Wish a son for me," one of them cried. "I desire to have a son."

"Wish for me big game when I go on my hunt. The gods have cheated me," another requested.

"Please wish for my husband who lies abed with a broken back these many months. Please wish that he will walk again."

It was awful. Such tales of woe and misfortune. It ate your very heart out to realize how much was needed. And how pitifully inadequate was your cheap little pretense of magic to meet the desperate needs.

"Tomorrow, my people. Tomorrow or the next day." That was all I could say. "No more magic tonight. I must take myself away to restore my powers. Go to your homes. Sleep until morning."

But, alas, there wasn't to be much sleep on that night. Certainly not for me.

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CAUTIOUSLY I inquired about the new dancer who had so fittingly interpreted my magic pronouncements. No one seemed to know much about her. Someone suggested that she had strayed into the village from some outlying district. Another hinted that I must have known her and brought her myself, for it appeared that our ceremony had been rehearsed.

"She is the new favorite of the King," was the confident judgment of one old lady. "Didn't you see how he watched her? Some of these times the Queen will commit murder."

"Where did the dancer go?" I asked.

"Most likely with all the other dancers. You may be sure the King and Queen are entertaining them with more feasting and drink at one of the royal houses."

"Yes, no doubt." But I thought to myself, Okay, I'll find her at the forking of the trail waiting for me with our phonograph records and good clothes. Tomorrow we'll board the Clipper.

But one more disturbing question detained me. Doubly disturbing because it came from one of the attendants who had run the errand to a certain corpse and returned with strips of flesh.

"Tell me, Kisqv, have you seen the Death Verse of another Kisqv?"

"The Death Verse?" I must have paled through the stain around my white mask. That parchment, of course! *Who strikes the Kisqv strikes a five-fanged serpent . . .*

"Need I explain," the attendant said rather quizically, "that any Kisqv who feels a premonition of approaching Death will write his last magic will in a Death Verse? And is it not also true that every Kisqv is visited by such a premonition before that Death strikes —even if the Death is to come by way of murder?"

These words created nothing short of a sensation among the dozen listeners who were still tagging at my heels. I had to stop and face them all without knowing what I dared say.

But they turned their alarmed questions on the talkative attendant. "What has happened? Has a Kisqv died? Has one been murdered?"

"I am not saying what has happened," the attendant replied stubbornly. "But I will say that Safsaf and we attendants are on the lookout. We believe a Death Verse will be found."

"From what source? Not the corpse from which you took the sinews?" they said.

"We are not saying."

"Where was that corpse?"

"If you must know, it was on the trail," said the attendant, and he proceeded to state the exact location, still asserting that he would tell nothing.

Within three minutes three or four dozen villagers struck out on the mountain trail with torches.

For my part, I made swift footsteps in the direction of the lower trail. But I didn't get far. I ran into Safsaf, who was apparently anticipating a meeting with me.

At the narrowed passage where the westbound path followed along between a stream and a wall of rock, Safsaf approached, waving a torch at me. His face was expressionless, as always, and by torchlight it had the hardness of rock; and the coldness of steel was in his eyes.

"Do not go away from us, Kisqv," he said in his low, authoritative voice. "You have not finished your part of the Death ceremony."

"My magic is done," I said.

"I think it is not enough for you to *wish.*"

"What more do you expect of a Kisqv?" I asked.

"In your case," he said slowly, "the

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magic will be more certain if you go directly to the hut where Parroko is sleeping and finish the deed with a knife . . . I will lend you my knife."

CHAPTER VIII

To Kill or Not to Kill

"YOU doubt my magic," I said to Safsaf. "But I have completed the ritual. The victim will be dead by morning. He is probably dead already."

"Dead asleep," Safsaf said. "Come, men, we will accompany the Kisqv to the hut where Parroko is sleeping."

Two attendants appeared from out of the darkness of the trail ledge. I sensed that my status was very nearly that of a prisoner. I retraced my steps and Safsaf and his men followed close behind me.

When we reached the house they lifted their torches and bade me look in through the window.

The light gleamed down on a shining spear lying on the floor. Then I made out the shadowy form beside it to be the handsome warrior, Parroko, sleeping peacefully. One arm was under his head for a pillow. The light bothered him. He shook his dark hair out of his eyes and reached for the spear. His hand rested on it, then he went on sleeping.

"Now is your chance to kill him, Kisqv," said Safsaf.

"I tell you my magic will kill him if he deserves to be killed."

The attendants looked to Safsaf to apply pressure. But Safsaf was studying me, not too sure of his suspicions. I knew that ever since I had smeared a bit of grape stain off my throat he had suspected me. He had guessed that I was not a dark-skinned man, but a white in disguise. Still, he couldn't be sure that I was an imposter when it came to magic.

I played my bluff as far as I dared.

"When you met me in the pass a few minutes ago," I said, "I was on my way to the fork in the trail, there to sing a song alone, to enhance my magic powers."

"Most Kisqvs go to the great five-fanged serpent in the third chamber of the cavern to enhance their powers," said Safsaf skeptically.

"I commune with a much larger serpent that crawls unseen through the heavens," I said. "He has fifty-five fangs."

They allowed me to go to the fork in the trail and sing my song. They went with me, of course, for they were growing more curious about my own private angles on this magic business.

I sang to the stars—in English, of course. For I hoped that I was singing to Sandra, hiding somewhere among the rocks. I sang words that made my captivity clear to her, and gave her a chance to answer, by croaking like a frog, or whistling like a bird, or tumbling rocks across the trail—if she were there within hearing.

No response. Sandra was not there.

Where, then, if not in the clutches of the King?

WE MADE our way back through the narrows and through the village clearing. My spirits were lower than a serpent's belly. I was trapped—yes, trapped by my own soft-heartedness. For now, I realized, the only way to get rid of Safsaf and his two strong-arm buddies was to go through with this ugly deal involving Parroko.

If I would kill Parroko, Safsaf would be satisfied that the reputation of the Kisqvs would not suffer. My magic, it would seem to the villagers, would have turned the trick. Then I would be free

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to go about my business—which, let no one doubt, was to find Sandra and get her away from this jungle of iniquity.

She would go with me, of course. She would be glad to shake the dust of this land off her feet. That weird dance of hers *hadn't* meant anything. It *hadn't* meant that the gruesome fascination of these primitive customs was getting a grip on her. Her father's love for the bizarre ways of savages would *not* get a choke-hold on her—not to the extent of her wanting to stay here. No, no, no, she couldn't possibly be persuaded by any offer of the King——

"You do not answer me, Kisqv," Safsaf was saying, holding the torch near my face and looking at me curiously. Where had my dreadful thoughts travelled? He repeated his question, "Are you prepared to kill Parroko now if he is not already dead from your magic?"

We were at the window again. Parroko was breathing softly. His fingers lay lightly upon the handle of the spear.

Safsaf pressed the handle of his knife against the flat of my hand.

"Will you take it and do the deed? . . . Or shall I remove your mask and see the face of the man who murdered the real Kisqv?"

I thought of Parroko's beautiful wife. I wondered where she was, and whether she might be watching over my own wife. I thought of the kindnesses she and Parroko had done for us. I thought of her lovely smile, and I looked upon the masculine handsomeness of this man who was her husband.

And then I thought of the soggy, sad-eyed, bloated King, and the cunning and evil behind his mask.

"I do not wish to kill Parroko," I said.

The knife was pressed against my hand but I did not close my fingers over it. It fell. Safsaf stared icily. One of the attendants picked it up and began idly chopping at a banana he had picked. Safsaf struck the fruit from his hand and seized the knife. His long arm thrust forward, and I found the point of the blade touching my throat.

"So you do not wish to kill Parroko!"

"You are making a mistake, Safsaf. I do not wish to kill him, because I wish my magic to have a chance. I wish——"

I caught myself. The very word *wish,* it seemed, caused the magic heat to throb between my temples. That *headdress*—how did I know that *it* was not somehow amplifying the electrical vibrations of my every wish?

"I will kill him," I said. "Give me the knife."

I CRAWLED through the window. My bare feet rested on the warm mat. I placed one foot firmly over the spear. The sleeping warrior passed his fingers over the handle lightly. He turned a little and lifted his spear arm, then slowly brought his hand down over his eyes to protect them from the light.

I took the knife. Safsaf reached through with the torch to give me a clearer view. Parroko's chest was bare. I crouched. I raised the knife. A false start—I was only gauging for the exact spot over the heart. I looked at the blade, I turned it a little so that it would slice squarely between Parroko's ribs.

Then I raised my arm swiftly and struck—and Safsaf struck at the same time. He struck my arm to spoil my aim. The knife plunged through the mat beside the spear handle.

"What—what's the matter?"

"Someone is coming," said Safsaf. "Listen!"

I drew the blade out of the mat, I crept away from Parroko. So near to an everlasting sleep, he was now stirring as if he might waken. Safsaf had turned away from me with the light and

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he and the attendants were moving away from the window. I crawled out and—although I didn't realize it—I was for a moment free. I might have run.

I was too weak to run. But what I saw now, moving along from house to house under the light of torches, was enough to freeze me like a stone.

"It's the old lady with the pig," Safsaf's low voice was almost breathless. "But it's not a pig. It's her son."

I saw what they saw, and with Safsaf's words I knew. This old woman was going from house to house, waking up her neighbors, telling them that she had her son again.

"He's been changed back! He is no longer a beast! He's my little boy!" She was so joyful she was in tears. Every neighbor she awakened, however groggy with sleep, rejoiced with her, in laughter or tears or both. And the little boy, as handsome a little savage as you ever saw, was talking a blue streak, dancing up and down, almost too happy and excited to contain himself.

It was a changed Safsaf that faced me now.

"Your magic has restored the child," he said. "Your magic is no longer to be doubted."

"Yes," I said weakly.

"It will kill Parroko."

"Yes . . . Yes, I suppose so."

Do you doubt your own power?"

I was groping. The impact of this power made me want to faint. If everything I wished for, ceremonially or otherwise, had a chance to come true, I had better hold tight and count my thoughts like thousand dollar bills—or diamonds—or human lives.

"It will kill Parroko only if he deserves to die," I said stubbornly. "But look well, Safsaf. What has just happened came at the very moment when I might have killed Parroko. Does that mean anything to you?"

"What could it mean?" Safsaf was very much ready to listen.

"It means that Parroko is not meant to die. There has been a slip somewhere. A mistake——"

From across the clearing came a messenger on the run, and he was calling for Safsaf. We hailed him and he came over to us, panting and puffing.

"News from the King," he said. "The King has made a mistake about his enemy, Safsaf! He wants you to bring the Kisqv to him at once."

"What has happened?"

"The King's personal enemy . . . He has decided it is someone else. It is not Parroko. If the Kisqv is willing, there is no need for Parroko to die."

CHAPTER IX

A Question of Five-Fangs

THE King didn't want to see me half as much as I wanted to see him—or so I thought. I could have embraced him with kindness for letting me spare Parroko. But on the other hand if he were making any kind of trouble for my Sandra, I was certainly in the mood to borrow Safsaf's knife.

Dancing girls were leaving the firelit grounds in front of one of the royal buildings as we arrived. The Queen, they said, had left in a fit of anger soon after the "new dancing girl" had left. It seems the King's attentions to this new girl (Sandra, of course) had set the Queen off in a jealous rage.

"But this new girl," I said, "where did she go?"

"Away with the wife of Parroko," they answered. "No one seems to know just who she is or where she came from. But there's no question that she's the King's favorite."

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A few minutes later I faced the King. He glared through the wreaths of smoke from his oriental pipe, and had me sit by the firelight and listen to his troubles. While the rest of the tribe slept, he said, was a good time for him to settle the most important affairs of his kingdom—which consisted chiefly, at the moment, of how to get rid of his sarcastic, hissing wife, and how to win the beauty of his heart for his new Queen.

"I have talked with this new beauty," he confided to me. "She is much lovelier than the wife of Parroko, and cleverer. I think I will not sleep again until I have done away with her husband so that I can conveniently marry her."

"She told you, then, that she has a husband?" I said, pushing my voiceless words out with the greatest difficulty.

"She revealed, in answer to my catch questions," said the King, "that her husband was actually present at our Death ritual tonight, and that he watched her dance and saw the whole performance—*not knowing that he was to be the victim.*"

"But how can he be——" I broke off with a gulp. What did this old codger mean, trying to make out that I, Sandra's one and only husband, should take the rap involved in that stuffed snake?

"I must tell you," said the King, "that the piece of red cloth which you fed the snake was not from Parroko's garment. It was a mistake."

"Don't tell me it belonged to the husband of this new dancer?" I stared at the King, trying to make him look me in the eye. He squirmed.

"Can't you fix it up for me, Kisqv? You men of magic have a way."

"You're making mockery of my magic," I said.

"Not at all. I have the utmost respect. All I ask is that you *wish. Wish* that the piece of garment did belong to her husband, whoever the man may be."

"Blasphemy!"

"But I am convinced that Parroko is not my enemy—so he must not take the ritual Death. You've got to do something."

SAFSAF had been listening in on this discussion, and now, high-minded gentleman that he was, he came forth with the one logical plan of action.

"We shall find out," Safsaf said, "exactly where that bit of red cloth came from. Then we shall know whose death to expect from the snake ritual."

Good old systematic Safsaf, as earnest and sincere as one might wish the King himself to be. Once I had thought he was promoting Parroko's death; but he was only following the course of action he thought right.

Confidently I predicted that an investigation would find Parroko not to be the owner of the garment. There was something from the Death Verse that echoed back to me . . . Someone was to lose his "covering" to the innocent. Would that not be a reference to a garment? Now, who was it, according to that parchment message?

"The garment did not belong to Parroko," I said. "I am sure because it was delivered to you by Graspy with his own chimpanzee hands—and Graspy had not seen Parroko."

"How do you know?" said Safsaf.

"Because the message which I gave him to deliver to one of Parroko's party was not delivered."

"How do you know that?" said the King.

"Because my wife hadn't received it."

"Your *wife?*"

"She was in Parroko's party," I said.

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"She is the new dancing girl you're trying to fall in love with." I aimed these words at the King and shot them hard.

He gave an awful puff on his pipe and I thought he was going to bite the stem in two. For the next five minutes he smoked like a burning haystack and refused to look up. He knew he had made himself as transparent as glass. He had asked me to falsify my magic to make myself the death victim—so he could marry my wife.

Safsaf was so much embarrassed by this turn of events that he strode off into the dark, leaving a few husky attendants around us to make sure we didn't come to blows during his absence. A moment later he returned with Graspy.

"Now, you with the chimp hands, answer my question honestly, or the Kisqv will give you a chimpanzee face to match your hands. *Where did you get the piece of garment that you passed off to us as Parroko's?"*

"I stole it," said Graspy. "I stole it a long time ago." His hands were quivering. And, lo and behold, *they were hands, not claws!*

Safsaf and the King both saw. Then they looked to me.

"I *wished,*" I said simply.

THE big question at stake was only made the more urgent by this revelation. My magic was a working thing. It was swift and effective. The wish of Death that I stuffed down the snake's throat was going to get someone, the King had no doubt about it.

"You stole the garment a long time ago," Safsaf resumed, clutching Graspy by his human wrist. "Out with it. Where did you steal the garment?"

The King leaped up, broke into a snort and a gasp. "Ugh! I remember! Don't tell! I remember that garment. Don't tell where you stole it!"

A very much agitated King. His flash of memory had burst with such suddenness that anything he might have intended concealing was revealed as bright as the campfire.

Graspy nodded sheepishly at the King. "What shall I do to make up for what I stole? It wasn't an expensive garment, only the color—so bright—and I didn't think you'd miss it——"

"Shut up!" said the King. "Curses on the garment. The ritual is the thing! The doom. It will cut me down. Me! The King! All because I wanted—I wanted——"

It was the hissing voice of the Queen that finished his limping, groping confession. She had come up in the darkness and was standing behind his back.

"All because you wanted a new Queen," she said. "First it was Parroko's wife. Then this new dancing girl caught your eye. So you wanted to kill your personal enemy, did you? And now it turns out that your personal enemy was yourself!"

The King's head sank into his folded arms. He had no answer. He was completely whipped, the more so because the damning words came from the one who was accustomed to lashing him.

But it was the Queen who thought she saw a way out for her husband, who otherwise might be expected to lose his life.

"So the snake that hangs on the highest branch of the highest tree on the cliff has never failed to bring death," she said. "But this will be an exception."

"How so?"

"No Kisqv's decision is final," she said. "There is always one appeal. We all know the source of the Kisqv's magic power is the five-fanged serpent in the third chamber of the cavern. *I* am not afraid to face that serpent. Are *you?"*

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"We should go at once," said Safsaf.

The silent King did not move until the Queen boxed his ears and told him to quit acting like a baby. "Come on, we're going to call on the big serpent."

"What do I hear?' said the King. "Voices coming from the trail? Who comes to the village at this late hour? It it almost morning."

"That's a party of our own people returning from an excursion up the trail," said Safsaf. "They went to look at the body of a Kisqv who met some strange Death yesterday. Perhaps they will have found his Death Verse."

"No," said Graspy, reaching into his pocket like an honest man. "They won't find it. I have it. I meant to steal it when this Kisqv gave it to me by mistake. But now that he has restored my hands, I will not steal. Here is the Death Verse."

CHAPTER X

The Death Verse at Dawn

THE amazing thing to me was that I still commanded respect as a Kisqv, even though these people had found out what had happened up there on the trail on the previous noon. They had seen the body, they had identified it as a former Kisqv. And now, in full proof, the Death Verse had come to light.

No doubt about it, I was getting by with a killing. No one cried murder at me. Why? Partly because my magic power was being proved, and that fact alone made me feared and respected.

Partly because it was being rumored about that I was also the husband of the beautiful girl who danced the weird Death ritual.

But most of all because of the Death Verse itself. You see, when a Kisqv writes a Death Verse for himself it is virtually an invitation to the Grim Reaper. One who happens along in time to cooperate with the Kisqv's purpose is not to be censured.

The little party around the King and Queen grew into a first-rate multitude before we reached the entrance of the caverns. Besides Safsaf and his attendants and the high-spirited Graspy with his human hands, there was also the entire party of villagers who had gone up the trail to see the dead Kisqv for themselves.

This party had arrived before the smaller group of us could give them the slip. They heard that a Death Verse had been found, and that news they quickly spread to waking villagers.

Parroko himself joined us, spear in hand. You could tell that he knew the score, all right. He walked along within easy spearing distance of the King all the way.

The Queen watched him with an admiring eye, and when we reached the mouth of the cavern she said, "You will not die, Parroko, for you are innocent in the eyes of this Kisqv. But to make sure, you had better come in with us and be assured by the great serpent."

We were ready to enter, but the crowd was too nearly a mob. They demanded to hear the Death Verse read. We simply could not leave them clamoring so. The King was obliged to read the verse aloud to them.

"Who strikes this Kisqv—" and the King gestured toward the hill trail to indicate the dead man, *"strikes a five-fanged serpent."* He gestured toward the cavern where the great serpent of magic was said to reside. *"Strike not lest five fates or fortunes be unleashed."*

The crowd looked at me, then, for I was the one who had struck. I could not read that host of faces, staring through the twilight of morning, staring out of large brown eyes, watching me with wonderment, estimating my pow-

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ers.

The King went on: *"Lest a visitor lose his fears to a King—"*

The villagers stole glances about, as if wondering who among them might be the visitor. Again the eyes came back to me. Could *I* be the one referred to? Did *I* have any fears that could be lost? Maybe *they* didn't know it, but I had plenty.

"Lest a King lose his covering to an Innocent,"

The King new what this meant, all right, and so did the others of us from the inner circle. We knew, and the crowd was sure to learn sooner or later, that a bit of the King's garment had been panned off as Parroko's—and who could be more the Innocent than Parroko?

"Lest an Innocent lose his fate to a Serpent,

"Lest a Serpent lose his form to a Queen,

"Lest a Queen lose her queenly gift to a visitor—"

HERE I caught my breath. If I was the visitor, was I to inherit some property of the Queen's? I shuddered. What would it be like if her hissing disposition were to be fastened on me for life? If she had any other queenly gift besides a gift for stirring up trouble, I hadn't observed it.

The latter part of the reading seemed only to summarize the foregoing: *"Who loses to a King, Who loses to an Innocent, Who loses to a Serpent, Who loses to a Queen, Who loses to a Visitor—"* and from that point the verse condensed itself into the letters KISVQ.

We left the crowd to think it over, and a few of us entered the cavern to see if there was anything we could do about it. The Queen was most anxious to lead us in and get everything straightened out to her own satisfaction. She had come here alone for consultations, much as one might go to a feared and dreaded hypnotist. She led the way in with the confidence of a lion tamer.

Safsaf and several guards were our protection. Some of the guards were left at the outside door to make sure the crowd didn't come in, or that the serpent didn't come out. Safsaf followed all the way to the third chamber. There he and the three men who had once hauled me around in the jog-wagon took their stand.

"Right-Rear" was eating as usual; for lack of anything better to munch on, he gathered some snails off the cavern wall and munched on them.

The early morning sunlight filtered in through the natural windows in the right wall. The floor of the cavern was slimy to my bare feet. Pools of blue water, whose depth I had no way of guessing, caused us to thread our way carefully along the walls. Soft blue mists rose from these pools.

We followed the Queen out into the center of this cavernous room by way of a narrow path of rock between two pools. There were only four of us who had come this far: the Queen, the King, Parroko, and myself. Now I looked for a retreat. I didn't like the dead-end route into which the Queen had led us. She leaped to a tiny island of rock within the pool to the right of the path.

"This is my conference post," she said with an exaggerated air of feeling at home. Each of us in turn leaped the wide yard of blue water—almost too much of a jump for the King.

For one person, such as the Queen, this little flat-topped cone of rock might have been an adequate station. But the four of us were crowded, and I, the last to jump, caught Parroko by the hand and almost upset him and the

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other two from their narrow footing.

"The serpent will come to us here," said the Queen. "We have made it in time. The serpent will change the doom of the Death ritual. You *don't* feel ill, do you, dear?"

Her last remark, directed at the King, was spoken in a most sarcastic manner, an air of "I told you so." She was missing no tricks. Her husband was going to live because she was saving him, bringing him here in time to appeal to the source of magic wisdom.

"I am not ill," said the King, though he sounded very sick indeed.

PARROKO turned to notice me for the first time. "You—you're the new Kisqv?" He whispered. "I have a message for you . . . No, not yet. I must first clear myself of the King's hatred. That's why I have come here."

The Queen was calling, not in Hazzwart language, surely, but in the language of serpents.

"Kissssssssssqv! Kissssssssssqv! Lisssssten to our wisssssssh! Commmmme, sssssserrrrrpent of fivvvvvve fannnnng!"

Her hiss grew louder, and the echoes of the cavern chamber multiplied the weird effects. Soon I was not able to tell whether it was only her whispered voice or whether an answer was blending with it.

Then it came clear, the answer, echoing back from the walls, so that we all looked around through the blue steam, into the dark recesses, across the deep blue pools. Where was the hissing coming from? It seemed to be first from one direction, then another.

"I lisssssstennnn toooo yourrrr wisssssssh!"

The King was looking down, and he was certainly ill now. His face was ashen, his sad eyes were wide with a sickly horror. And no wonder. Those whispered replies were coming from the surface of the waters right at the edge of the little cone-shaped island that held us.

The serpent's head, a trifle larger than my own, moved noiselessly above the surface, only three or four feet of its neck showing. A silent swimmer. Brilliantly colored. As it rounded our little station, a curve of its back arched out of the water, like a bowed tree trunk, a flashy yellow patterned with a mosaic of green and purple markings.

Now as it rounded us again I caught a clear view of its head—sensitive red nostrils, a deep red throat within the ivory fangs—three above, two below. Its eyes, in contrast to all its other bright colors, were opalescent, soft, mysterious. Somehow you knew at once that it was very wise, very cunning, and much amused at our helplessness in its presence.

"Soooo, youuuu neeeeed the powerrrrs of Kissssssqv!"

With these words it suddenly reared upward from the surface of the water and seized my plumed headgear with its fangs.

CHAPTER XII

Serpentine Magic

IT WAS a fascinating sight to watch that monstrous creature swimming around us slowly with the black-plumed headdress in its mouth. With each hiss, the plumes puffed outward with an audible flutter, and sometimes you could see through the circle of them, into the serpent's red throat. The red of the headgear band was like the red of that throat; and the colored markings which I had been wearing next to my forehead were of the same pattern as the green and purple design that tapered down to a point on the serpent's bright yellow nose.

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"He's breathing powers into your headpiece," Parroko whispered to me. "No Kisqv has powers of his own when he is not wearing his plumes."

For a few minutes this process went on as the serpent made one round after another of our tiny island. The Queen's hissing questions were ignored during those minutes, and she was growing distressed—yes, fearful. Her husband looked to be very ill. I knew her suspicion was growing—that he would cave in under the weight of that stuffed snake ritual before this great serpent answered her appeals.

Two coils of the serpent's cylindrical body folded up on each other at the edge of our station. Its head came sliding along for a third coil.

"It's coming too close," the King mumbled.

"It has to come close to talk to us," said the Queen, scornful of her husband's nervousness.

It raised its head and replaced the headdress over my forehead. I drew the band down snugly. It was warm with an abundance of that strange electrical heat. What a wonderful elation I felt in that moment! As if I might wish for anything in the world.

But this wise serpent read my thoughts.

"Beforrrre annny wisssssssh," it whispered, coiling more closely around our island until its chill body rubbed softly against my shins, "firrrrst the Deathhhh Verrrrse of anotherrr Kisssssqv mussssst beeee fulfilllllled!"

The high whistling sound of its last word rang through the chamber, and I saw Safsaf and his three companions, at the cavern passage many yards away, half crouched in fear or wonderment.

"What is the meaning of the verse?" the Queen cried out, now suddenly losing her bravado.. "I do not want to lose my queenly gift to any visitor."

The serpent didn't answer. It was busy crawling around us, coiling closer, arching its neck in such a way as to look into the faces of one after the other of us out of its glistening opalescent saucer eyes.

"Your queenly gift!" the King mocked weakly. "Yes, you're a great charmer, aren't you! Why don't you tell this beast to quit scraping so close to my knees."

A sort of answer came from the serpent itself. It talked, hissing and whistling, with an outpouring of ideas that somehow fascinated and held us. It must look at us, one by one, it must weigh us in the toils of its own body, to know what we were made of and which of us best fulfilled each of the stipulations of the dead Kisqv.

IT SEEMED to be having a hard time making up its mind. We were crowded together more closely. Our little circle began to tighten.

Fear struck us, one after another. It charged through my heart when Parroko whispered to me:

"My message—in case I should not be released from this: She has gone on. My wife is accompanying her to the coast. She will board a plane there. This I was to tell to you."

I thanked him. I hardly had breath to do more. Too late I realized what a fool I had been. This serpent had gathered around us in four tightening coils. It had somehow hypnotized us with its whisperings, and gathered in on us while we listened.

It was tightening, tightening.

Those last breaths—ghastly grunts and wheezes, sickening gurgles. Both the King and Queen tried to demand some knowledge of the fate that the Death Verse had promised them. But now the snake's hiss was no longer the articulate whispering of words. It was

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the hiss of mockery, a taunting, spine-chilling hiss of laughter.

"Haaaaah-ggg-sss-sss! Haaaaah-ggg-sss-sss!!"

The Queen screamed. Her scream died away like a wail of death. The King tried to cough. He seemed to be choking. Tighter, tighter, the cold pressure, the silken pressure of smooth steely muscles within wet yellow skin.

Now for me the light was fading. The breath was gone. A wild array of color swam before my closed eyes. Yellow—a mad yellow in a vast coil—yellow spinning with designs of brilliant purple—no, green—no, purple again——

Fading — fading — sounds — like crushing bones——

CHAPTER XIII

The Queenly Gift

THE moment I began to awaken out of my cruel, painful sleep, I knew that I had changed.

I was still in the cavern, in the third chamber, but no longer on the tiny conical island. I lay along a narrow ledge above a blue pool. The shafts of morning sun through the natural rock windows had shortened their angle, but I knew that hardly an hour had passed.

First I saw Safsaf. He was staggering along almost like a drunken man, but there was a strong light of triumph in his eyes. In his hand was the knife that I had come so near to using on Parroko a few hours before. It was a blood-drenched knife now. Safsaf himself was marked with bloodstains, his scanty clothes were in tatters. It had been an awful fight.

The serpent was a dead thing. He had killed it somehow. He had ripped it through in a dozen places. It lay draped over the little island and over parts of the wall ledge. Many patches of its gray and white entrails were exposed. Its huge head, not quite torn away from its body, hung limp and lifeless over a jagged edge of rock. One of its lustrous eyes hung open, the other had been battered shut.

A change had come over me, and my first clear-cut feeling of altered instincts, as I groped for consciousness, concerned Safsaf. Grizzled, gaunt man that he was, he was every inch a hero—and he was handsome. And I lay on the shelf watching him walking along the opposite side of the cavern, and I gathered my disarrayed clothing about myself as neatly as I could, covering my breasts and smoothing the skin anklets that still clung to me.

I adjusted the goatskin mask on my face. I rolled up the cascade of blonde hair that hung over my shoulder, and covered it tightly within the Kisqv headdress. I glanced at myself in the blue water to see whether I looked as much the Kisqv as ever.

The ordeal had cost me much of the stain that had formerly darkened my body. So I made haste to apply the dark slime from rocks to white spaces.

A shadow moved at one of the natural rock windows. Safsaf, now being helped toward the next room by some of the attendants, turned to see what I also saw — the King crawling out through the rock opening.

The King glanced back to see if anyone was witnessing his escape—for escape it must have been. I never saw such a picture of fear in any man's countenance. For a moment I was flooded over with the images of my own recent fears, fears that shot through me with all my troubles of playing Kisqv. That terror, awful desire to run away from it all—this was the King's, now, not mine.

"Lest a Visitor lose his fears to a King!"

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The Queen would not go with him. Neither he nor she were likely ever to return to the tribe. For Kisqv magic had struck them cruel blows—perhaps deserved, perhaps not.

It was the swish of water that turned my eyes toward the left. The Queen was crawling in to swim. Half immersed, she tore the last shreds of clothing from her body. She would not care for them now. She would live as a water creature, a sort of mermaid of elongated form. The lower half of her body bore a very close resemblance to that of a large serpent.

She stroked with her arms, gave a spiteful swish of her tail, and swam away into the dark recesses. I caught her one backward look, just before she disappeared, and I thought there was no terror in her face, but rather an accentuated hatred and sullen snake-like expression, as if she were entirely ready to take on the temper of her altered life.

"Lest a serpent lose his form to a Queen——"

WHEN I emerged from the cave, many of the villagers stood back with their customary awe, and I was sure that many of them believed it was my magic which had slashed the life out of the great cavern serpent.

I set them right on that matter at once.

"Safsaf did it," I said. "Safsaf is your hero—*and mine.*" And then I began to talk of the sky serpent I had once mentioned as having not five but fifty-five fangs—for I saw that these superstitious people needed a god of magic. In fact, they might turn upon Safsaf for killing their source of magic, in spite of his heroism. Yes, and in spite of his fulfillment of the Kisqv's Death Verse:

"Lest an Innocent lose his fate to a Serpent."

There it was. Death had been intended for Parroko, the Innocent. But the serpent had got it. It must have been a fate predestined in the order of things—that a Kisqv, empowered by the five-fanged serpent, should predict his own death and that of the source of all Kisqv power. These people must have a new source of power.

But Safsaf silenced me.

"We of the Hazzwart tribe will not lack for magic," he said. "The sources will not run out. What you are saying only exposes your ignorance. From the first you have not known what powers lie within the headdress that you wear."

What a man was this Safsaf. A fine, kingly man with a splendid voice that made one like me feel weak and obedient in his presence. He would undoubtedly be made the ruler, now that the King had run away, a victim of nameless terrors.

"You are not a Hazzwart." Safsaf approached me, and everyone, gathered here in the clearing, listened to his charges. He was about to touch me. "You are not one of us. I believe you are a white man."

He jerked the headdress off my head, and the waves of yellow hair tumbled down on my shoulders. He started to rip the clothing from my white body. *Then he saw that I had become a woman.* Everyone stared at me.

"Womanhood—*the queenly gift,*" I heard Parroko say, *"lost to a visitor."*

Safsaf, mumbling his apologies, demanded that a robe be brought for me.

Then, with all the chivalry that any man, savage or otherwise, might offer to a woman, Safsaf made provision for me to be safely conducted to the coast as swiftly as possible.

I SAT beside Sandra in the Clipper. She did not know me. She did not

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know how I could have been given her husband's reservation. I did not have the nerve to tell her.

Poor kid, she was terribly broken up over having to go back without her husband. I tried to comfort her. I *did* comfort her, in a way that no one else could. She was more than amazed, before the journey home was completed, that I had such a perfect understanding of her tragic situation.

More than once I slipped, and she would get that strange glassy look in her eyes, as if my uncanny grip on her innermost thoughts might cause her to lose her mind.

"You do have the recordings safe and sound?" I once said, and then caught myself.

"How could you possibly know that I am bringing recordings?"

My dodges grew weaker and weaker. I feared that by the time we reached the United States she would be ready to banish me from her sight forever, to relieve herself of these baffling pressures.

On the contrary, she forced me to come to her home with her, to help her face her father with all the tragic story of her adventures. It seemed that I filled a psychological niche, she said; that I helped to fill the awful void of having lost one's husband.

I begged her not to announce her husband as dead.

"Perhaps he is not dead," she would say. "Perhaps he is worse than dead. If you had seen him, bending his sanity to the ways of savages, falling victim to the mysteries that only primitives understand, you would realize that even if he were alive, he might never break the bonds of that awful mysticism to come back to me as he once was."

And so she preferred to think of me as dead—and I, frantic within my web of lies and subterfuges, still fought to keep alive some spark of her dying hope.

Two weeks after our return a package arrived from the Hazzwarts. In the crude Hazzwart handwriting that suggested a collaboration between Saf-saf and Parroko was a most important message.

"We send to you the Kisqv headdress which you must wear to wish the wish that you are sure to wish."

To be a man again! Since the creation of Adam, has ever any living human being found more glory in coming to himself than I experienced during the week that I wore the black plumes and wished!

Yes, Sandra and I are living happily ever after, thank you!

THE END

HINTS OF COMING ENJOYMENT

THE war is over! And paper has been released! And workers are returning to the printing firms, slowly but surely! And *Fantastic Adventures* can now spread its wings and —well, there's going to be a "Lark On The Ark" as Richard Casey says in the title of one of the many grand stories with which we are going to start off the victory celebration. In his turn, Lester Barclay will sing a "Siren Song" of sheer joy, and that's something, brother! "The Life Symbol," by Berkeley Livingston is the symbol of the future for *Fantastic Adventures;* the old gal's going to show plenty of life from now on! Part of that life will be demonstrated in the antics of "Toka And The Mad Molak," which is a sequel to that mad novel "King Of the Dinosaurs" over which you readers went equally mad. Then to introduce the allurement of romance, Elroy Arno brings us "Moon Slave"—and boy, is she some slave! We wouldn't mind being a slaver ourselves! And the illustration by the way, is by Magarian. Not to slight a great artist, Virgil Finlay presents two of his finest illustrations of all time to add to our first big gala celebration of war's end. But we don't want to spoil all the surprises in store for you in the next big issue of *Fantastic Adventures,* except that we will say you'll get the biggest two-bits worth you ever saw! Keep haunting your newsstand—it'll be any day now!

The Editors.

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By CHESTER S. GEIER

AFTERNOON sunlight was spread like a bright blanket over the veranda. Elbows resting on the stone balustrade, Amelia Blanding stood looking down at the garden. She relaxed under the gentle pressure of the sunlight, felt it warm the cold weight of bitterness inside her.

The creak of bedsprings came through the opened French windows behind Amelia. Then followed an old woman's quavering voice.

"Amelia!"

"Yes, Aunt?" Amelia turned reluctantly from the sunlight and the garden, entered the shaded depths of a great bedroom. Her angular, bony face was expressionless. It did not show the irritation which she always felt at the senile whine of old Harriet Blanding's voice.

Harriet had pulled herself to a sitting position on the huge four-poster bed. Pain of the effort twisted her wrinkled, pale features into a grotesque mask.

"Do you want something, Aunt?" Amelia asked, with just the right shade of eager interest tinging her words. She loathed the necessity of being servile as much as she feared the consequencs of rebellion. She knew she was to inherit the Blanding fortune upon the death of Harriet, but she was aware at the same time that she could not be absolutely certain of this until the old woman finally was gone. Amelia had to be careful until the very end.

"I've been thinking about Sue," old Harriet said. "I think I'm going to change my will."

A flood of horror washed abruptly over Amelia. She swayed, and her face turned pale. Clutching one of the bedposts, she stared down at Harriet with wide, frightened eyes.

"What!" she gasped. "Why . . . why, what do you mean, Aunt?"

Harriet Blanding relaxed back upon the pillow. Her wrinkled eyelids closed, and she breathed rapidly. In the sunlight which poured in through the French windows she looked like a shrivelled mummy which had somehow been invested with life.

Finally old Harriet spoke again. Trembling, Amelia leaned over the bed, to catch every word which came from those puckered, bloodless lips.

"I haven't much longer to live, Amelia," old Harriet said. "Dr. Thayer has given me six more months at the most. Thinking about the end has made me see things in a clearer light." The old woman paused, and her eyes opened. "Sue is a sweet girl. She's young and has a whole life ahead of her. As the will now is, the bulk of the Blanding estate falls to you. Sue receives only a mere pittance. I hardly think that's fair to her. She and Tom Vale—"

AT MENTION of the name, everything faded into unreality for Amelia. She entered a dream-world built for two. The beat of her heart quickened, and something that was almost beauty came into her long, bony face.

Tom Vale. . . . Just by closing her eyes, Amelia could see the strength and the youth of him. She could see him standing straight and tall, with his broad shoulders thrown back, and the brown, curly hair tumbled over his forehead. And she could see the slow grin lift one corner of his mouth while his serious, brown eyes lightened.

But, as always, the shadow of Sue came to darken the picture. Sue. Tom Vale loved Sue Hollister. Blinded by the youth and beauty of the other girl, he just couldn't see Amelia.

Hot hands of rage shook Amelia.

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Amelia Blanding meant only great good when she gave Sue the jewel to wear—that was what she said, but she was actually plotting murder!

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She hated her cousin, Sue, with the deadly intensity which only a homely, older woman can feel for another who has youth and beauty. Not that Amelia actually considered herself homely and old. She thought there was dignity in her thirty-six years of age, an aristocratic effect in being tall and thin. It was only when she thought of Sue, small, pert, and rounded, that she had her doubts.

The last fragment of Amelia's dream-world vanished. Her attention focused back upon the woman in the bed.

"Sue and Tom Vale are very much in love," old Harriet was saying. "The thing which hinders them from getting married is that Tom can't afford it. His business has suffered serious reverses, and he needs a large sum of money to get back on his feet." Harriet turned toward Amelia with an eagerly confiding air. "That's why I intend to change my will. If I left Sue the amount of money which Tom needs, they'll be able to get married. Tom may not like the idea of using Sue's money, but with his business going again, he'll have more than a good chance to pay it back. I'm sure he'll see it that way."

"But Sue's an outsider!" Amelia protested. "She has no right to the Blanding fortune."

"She's the child of your mother's sister," old Harriet reminded. "I don't see why you should feel that way. And I don't see why you should want to deny Sue and Tom this chance." Harriet shrugged fragile shoulders. "Anyway, I consider the matter finished. You'll still have the house and more money than you'll ever need. Now leave me awhile—I'm exhausted." Harriet relaxed into the bed, and her eyes closed wearily.

Through force of long habit, Amelia leaned over the old woman, pulling the covers up around her withered throat. Her lips were pressed into a white line, and her eyes were slits of fury. For an awful moment, her taloned hands poised over Harriet's scrawny neck. Then, shaking, her hands withdrew.

With an effort, Amelia composed herself. Not that way. It would be too obvious. She'd be sent to prison. No—she had a better way, an infinitely safer way.

Quietly Amelia left the room, and softly she closed the door. She paused a moment in the hall, listening. The mansion was very still in the late spring afternoon. Amelia recalled that Sue and Tom had left for town that morning. They wouldn't be back until evening. Old Phelps, the butler, would be cleaning the silverware, and Melinda, the cook, would be starting her preparation of the evening meal.

Everything was perfect for what Amelia intended to do. Just perfect.

AMELIA went quickly to her room, turning the key in the lock. From a drawer of her dresser, she took a case, a tiny one of the size which might have held a ring. But the object within was not a ring. It was a jewel—a strange pink jewel, pear-shaped and perfect.

Amelia was careful not to touch the jewel. She had done so once, long ago, and still crystal-clear in her mind was the frightful memory of how the world had clouded and the strength had drained from her body. It was only because of an overwhelming horror that she had been able to unclasp her hand and hurl the deadly thing away. And she remembered, when later she had picked it up, how it had been touched with the faintest tinge of red. Like a leech, she thought, only dimly aware of the truth.

It was from her mother, Agatha, that

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Amelia had inherited the jewel. Agatha had lain in a four-poster bed very similar to the one in which old Harriet lay now and her austere, patrician features had been ravaged by the illness which had finally taken her away. Across the gulf of years came the whisper of her fading voice.

"This is all I have to leave you, child. Take good care of it, for it is the most precious thing in the world. The jewel has been in the Lawson family for many generations, and has gotten them out of difficulties many times. If anyone should ever stand in your way, do not antagonize him—just let him wear the jewel. You will be one enemy the less." Agatha had somehow managed a ghastly chuckle. Then had come the revelation.

"Your father was my enemy, a miserly, spiteful man. Because of a quarrel, he deliberately cut me out of his will. And he would have cut you out, too, if I'd given him the chance. But I didn't. I let him wear the jewel as a watch-charm to show that I harbored no bad feelings. He simply wasted away and died. That is how the jewel works, child. . . ."

Amelia had not been shocked by this death-bed confession. What little she remembered of her father, Gregory Blanding, was not pleasant. And there was within her a streak of callousness and cruelty rivalling even her mother's.

Now Amelia bent over the jewel where it lay in its case on the dresser. She gazed deep into the evil, pink heart of it, and she gloated at what she saw.

IT WAS going to be easy—so very easy. She would present Aunt Harriet with the jewel, and the old woman would die without changing her will. Sue, with her pittance, would not be able to help Tom Vale, and the two would not be able to marry. Amelia knew Tom was too proud to marry in poverty.

With a quickening of her heart, Amelia recalled Tom Vale's desire to revive his business. Most likely, he was desperate enough to welcome almost any source of money. And with the Blanding fortune in her possession, Amelia would have enough to help him many times over. She would offer Tom Vale the money he needed—with, however, the condition that he marry her to obtain it. And then he would be hers. Her reasoning powers dulled by the intensity of her desire, Amelia did not doubt this. She knew money could not buy love, but if she had Tom Vale, that alone would be sufficient.

Hands trembling with eagerness, Amelia obtained a thin, gold chain from among her jewelry. She strung the jewel onto this, so that it hung pendant-fashion. Then, tense with the purpose that motivated her, she stole from the room.

Out in the hall, she listened. Nothing had changed. The old mansion was still quiet and serene.

Amelia slipped into old Harriet's room and tiptoed cautiously over to the bed. She hesitated. Her original plan had been to awaken her aunt and present her with the jewel, as a sort of apology gift for the way she had talked against Sue. But now Amelia saw no need to awaken the old woman. In her weakened condition, Harriet would succumb so fast that she would never again open her eyes.

Amelia held her breath. Very gently, she lay the jewel into one of the veined, thin hands on the coverlet. Then she returned to her room.

It was not until the door had been closed that Amelia dared breathe. She expected to feel a stab of fear at what she had done. She sat down and waited

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for it to come—but it didn't. She knew only a dark, gloating satisfaction.

Slowly the sunlight faded. Shadows stretched and deepened within the room. Amelia glanced at her watch. Time for dinner. She usually brought up a tray from the kitchen for Harriet, and when her aunt had finished, she went to the dining room for her own meal.

Amelia rose and smoothed her dress. Settling her face into its habitual unconcerned lines, she went down to the kitchen.

"And how's Miss Harriet?" Melinda wanted to know.

'She seems to be resting very well," Amelia responded. "I haven't heard a sound from her all afternoon."

"Might be a bad sign," Phelps muttered. "Old people go that way."

Amelia forced a smile. "Not Aunt Harriet. There's still a few years left in her."

WITH the tray in her hands, Amelia left the kitchen. She found the trip up the stairs strangely hard to make. It had never been that way before. Walking up and down these stairs had been her sole means of exercise, and she had almost enjoyed it. The flight of stairs was a long one, and steep. In spite of her worries, Amelia wondered as she always did what would happen if she were ever to fall. It was something of a phobia with her, which explained why, as a child, she had never slid down the tempting, long curve of the banister.

Before the door of old Harriet's room, Amelia paused. Almost she was afraid of what she would find beyond. Then, impelled by the desire to see the outcome of her deed, she pushed open the door and entered the room.

There was no slightest flicker of motion from the bed. The quavering voice which Amelia knew so well did not sound. The evening shadows which filled the room seemed strangely heavy and deep.

Amelia set down the tray and went softly to the bed. In the dusk, the waxen paleness of old Harriet's features seemed to glow. Her eyes were closed, looking sunken in the shadows. Tentatively, Amelia touched one withered hand. It was cold—cold. And when Amelia listened for the faintest wheeze of breath, it was not there. Harriet Blanding was dead. Quite dead.

The jewel still lay in the wrinkled palm. Amelia picked it up by its length of gold chain, straightening with triumph. Now she saw that it was no longer pink. It had become suffused with a deep red hue that resembled the color of blood. Like a leech, Amelia thought again, and nausea stirred at the pit of her stomach. But a moment later she smiled in satisfaction at what had been achieved. Returning the jewel to its case, she went down to the kitchen.

"Aunt Harriet is dead," she told Melinda and Phelps. And her face looked properly grieving.

THE week which followed was something of a nightmare for Amelia. Dr. Thayer signed the death certificate readily enough, but there were seemingly endless conferences with the mortician who, out of respect to the wealth of the Blandings, paid a disgusting amount of attention to details. And then there were the obnoxiously hypocritical condolences offered at the wake, and the strain of just sitting around, looking limp and mournful. Amelia hated the black garments she had to wear. They made her look gaunt. But at last it was all over.

To Amelia, the only bright spot

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about the whole affair was the reading of the will which lawyer Hurley made in the library, after the funeral. It was something she liked to look back upon with vindictive, gloating pleasure.

The Blanding wealth had fallen to Amelia, of course, since she was the only Blanding left. There had been small bequests to Sue, Melinda, and Phelps, with, however, the provision that the fortune was to revert to Sue in the event that anything happened to Amelia. This did not worry Amelia in the slighest. It was a remote possibility, and she intended to take good care that it did not occur.

Aside from having acquired the Blanding fortune, Amelia's main satisfaction was derived from the bitter disappointment which had aged Sue's small face and the utter hopelessness which had deepened in Tom Vale's. Amelia was elated almost to bursting at the success of her plans thus far. And, recalling the financial difficulties which formed a barrier between Sue and Tom, she had little doubt of their eventual, complete culmination. Already Amelia was imagining herself married to Tom Vale and thinking of the parties at which she would show him off.

FOR a week after the funeral, Amelia was busy arranging the affairs of the mansion in the new order which suited her. Sue was a wan little figure, seen only at meals, and the smiles which she gave in response to Amelia's occasional conversational sallies were at best only pathetic attempts. Tom Vale was absent from the house for some time, but one day he finally put in an appearance. That was what Amelia had been waiting for.

She dressed particularly well that night. For some time now she had been attending a beauty parlor, and had accepted everything offered her in the way of facials, permanents, and manicures, and while the result had an overdone effect, Amelia was convinced that she was more than Sue's equal in looks.

If Amelia was aware that Tom had come to see Sue and was just aching for a chance to talk to her alone, she gave no indication of it. Quite skillfully, she monopolized the entire conversation, and succeeded the whole evening in keeping the young couple apart. And then Amelia sent Sue upstairs to search for an entirely nonexistent photograph album. Amelia, almost shaking with the excitement of the moment, faced Tom Vale.

"Tom, there . . . there's something I want to talk to you about."

He looked at her, solemnly quizzical, the brown curls tumbled over his forehead. "Yes, Miss Blanding?"

"Oh, Tom, can't you drop that eternal 'Miss Blanding?'" she cried impatiently.

He stared at her, at once startled and puzzled. "Why, sure, if you want it that way," he answered slowly.

Amelia drew a deep breath. One point had already been won. She tried to compose herself, hoping that he wouldn't notice the way her tightly-clasped hands trembled or the way her lips twisted.

"Tom, I hope it isn't too late to do something about getting your business reinstated." Amelia bit her lip, for her voice had sounded queerly high and shrill with nervous tension.

But it was the content of her words not their tone which had registered upon Tom Vale. The slightly bewildered look faded from his face, and the lines of hopelessness returned. "No, it isn't too late—but it will be if I can't manage to do something soon."

"Have you found any prospects for

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obtaining a loan?"

"I'm afraid not. It's a lot of money, and I don't know who'll lend it to me." Suddenly his eyes jerked to hers. "What are you getting at? Do you mean you'll—"

Amelia nodded slowly. "Yes, Tom, I could let you have the money. In fact, I could let you have enough to buy another business like yours."

Tom Vale sat tensely upright, brown eyes gleaming, the slow smile lifting one corner of his wide lips. "Why, say, that's swell of you!" he exclaimed. "Sue and I will never be able to thank you enough."

"Sue doesn't enter into this!" Amelia snapped.

"Oh. I see." Instantly his eager grin died. He slumped back into his chair, his eyes avoiding her's.

"Look here, Tom," Amelia pursued swiftly, "I want you to marry me. As your wife, I'd turn over to you a sum of money large enough to get your business going again—or anything else you might want, for that matter. I'm offering you a wonderful opportunity. You know by now that you'll never be able to borrow an amount of money as large as you need, and surely the condition which I impose is much easier to meet than anything else with which you might be confronted. Tom—will you do it?"

FOR a long moment he was silent. Then he slowly shook his head. "I'm sorry. I just couldn't go through with a thing like that. I love Sue. . . ."

"Oh, Sue!" Amelia spat contemptuously. She leaned forward, her face intense. "Tom, don't be a sentimental fool. What has Sue to offer that I can't? She's just a penniless snip of a girl. All your life with her you'd have to skimp and scrape to meet bills. You weren't made for a life like that. And, Tom, I'm offering you your only chance. You won't get another like it."

Again he shook his head. "I . . . I can't do it—honestly. I just couldn't forget Sue."

Amelia tried another tack. "Perhaps I've been too hasty about this matter, Tom. I'll give you a few days to think it over."

"It's no use," he answered doggedly. "I won't change my mind."

Amelia rose to her feet. Her angular thin, form was shaking, and her face was very white. ""Then . . . you just won't consider marrying me?"

"I'm sorry."

Amelia swayed, caught herself. The room whirled crazily before her eyes. A burning constriction in her throat prevented her from uttering the scathing denunciation which frothed up within her. She turned blindly and ran from the room.

Amelia threw herself upon her bed and sobbed her rage, humiliation, and disappointment into the pillow. Later, in all her bedraggled finery, she fell asleep. When she awoke, it was still dark. She stared into the darkness, and a plan began to shape itself in her thwarted mind.

Sue. . . . Now, as never before, Amelia hated Sue. She loathed the girl for her youth and beauty, from which no amount of promised wealth seemed able to turn Tom Vale.

Sue stood in the way of her happiness, Amelia thought grimly. Sue was an enemy. Therefore—Sue would be next to wear the jewel.

Amelia could not get back to sleep. She lay still upon the bed, gazing fixedly before her, until the morning sun shone bright and warm through the windows of her room. Then she rose, bathed and dressed. A careful application of cosmetics made her face look normal enough.

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FINALLY Amelia felt herself ready for what she had to do. From its case, she took the jewel. Then she walked quickly to Sue's room, rapped softly at the door.

"Some in." Sue was still in bed, her chestnut hair tumbled upon the pillow, her blue eyes moist with sleep.

"Good morning, dear," Amelia greeted. She sat down on the side of the bed. "Did Tom tell you what happened last night?"

"Why, no," Sue replied. An expression of bewilderment removed the welcoming smile from her small face. "What do you mean, Amelia?"

"We had a little quarrel," Amelia said, as though reluctant to admit it. "It was nothing really important, but I'm afraid we did hurt each other's feelings."

Sue looked relieved. "Tom acted very strange when I rejoined him last night, and I wondered what was wrong. Amelia, that quarrel. . . . It couldn't have been over money?"

"It was—in a way." Amelia turned her head to hide the flush which leaped into her face.

"You offered Tom the money he needed for his business, and he refused. Wasn't that it? Oh, Amelia, it was good of you! Tom's so stubborn."

Amelia nodded quickly. "Yes—he is. And that's why I want you to have this." Amelia produced the jewel, dangling at the end of its loop of gold chain. "I know the situation in which you find yourself with Tom, and I can't see anything else I can do to help you. I hope this will cheer you up—even just a little. Will you wear it?"

"Wear it?" Sue exclaimed. "Of course I will! It's beautiful." She fastened the chain about her throat, and the jewel glowed pinkish-red against her white skin. She began to cry. "Amelia—you're so good."

"There, there," Amelia murmured soothingly. "Come now, get dressed and we'll have breakfast."

That afternoon, Sue complained of not feeling well. By evening she had taken to bed, listless and weak.

When Tom called, he was alarmed at Sue's condition. "She's sick," he told Amelia. "I think we'd better call a doctor."

"Sue will be all right in the morning," Amelia answered, with the assurance of one woman who understands the ills of another.

But Tom continued to worry. He sat at the side of Sue's bed until the hour grew very late. Finally he came down to the living room, where Amelia sat pretending to read. His face was white and grim.

"Listen, this is serious," he said. "We'll just have to call a doctor."

Amelia looked at his determined face. She saw at once that argument was useless. "If you insist. But I really don't think there's anything very wrong with Sue."

"Perhaps not, but we'd better play safe," Tom insisted.

Amelia hid the swift rage which flamed within her. Hating Tom Vale for having forced her to do it, she put in a telephone call to Dr. Thayer.

THAYER had been the Blanding family physician for many years, a short, ruddy-faced man, with thin strands of gray hair brushed carefully over the top of his head. He went up to see Sue as soon as he arrived. Amelia and Tom Vale followed, standing by silently while Thayer made his examination. Sue looked very thin and pale. Amelia noticed, with an inner glow of satisfaction, that the jewel was still hanging on its chain about the girl's throat had deepened in color.

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At last, Thayer straightened up, removing a stethoscope from his ears. His jovial features were puzzled.

"What is it, Doctor?" Tom Vale prompted. "What's wrong with her?"

"That's just it," Thayer responded. "I don't know. Sue is a very sick girl—yet strangely she doesn't show any recognizable symptoms. I've never ran across anything like this before." Thayer pulled at his lower lip, frowning deeply. Finally he sat down in a chair beside the bed.

Tom Vale began to pace the floor, face haggard, clenched hands working anxiously. Thayer watched Sue, the frown heavy upon his face.

Amelia remained until she could bear the silent tension of the scene no longer. She went to her room and lay down, smiling exultantly into the darkness. Her plan was working—working magnificently. The jewel, still sated from old Harriet, was working rather slowly—but apparently just as thoroughly. It wouldn't be long now until Sue was dead. And then. . . . Amelia's smile grew.

SUNLIGHT glaring into her closed eyes awakened Amelia. She sat up in bed, astonished to find that it was morning. She washed, changed her dress, and left the room. Out in the hall, she heard a buzz of voices from below. She began to descend the stairs. Almost at the same time, Tom Vale appeared at the bottom and began to mount quickly toward her.

Amelia stopped at the head of the stairs. "Good morning, Tom. How's Sue?"

"Not much better," he said. His face was grooved with lines of weariness, his hair and clothing dishéveled.

Amelia stared at him. *Not much better.* . . . Something was wrong! Sue should have succumbed entirely to the jewel by now!

"Thayer still doesn't know what's wrong with Sue," Tom went on. "He's sent to the Coast for a specialist in rare diseases. The man is coming here by special plane." Tom Vale's gaze dropped to his hands. Abruptly he looked up, his ravaged features purposeful. "This is going to cost a lot of money. More than Sue has—or that I can hope to raise. I know you can't be expected to pay the bill after. . . . after what happened between us yesterday. But the money has to be obtained some way, and so—well, if your offer of marrying me still holds, I'll accept if you'll see that Sue is taken care of."

"You . . . you'd marry me—just for that?" Amelia gasped. Indignant rage rose within her.

TOM VALE nodded slowly. "Yes—and that's why I want to return this to you." From a pocket of his coat, he produced the jewel, swaying on its chain. "While Sue was able to talk last night, she told me why you gave this to her—because of me. I want you to take it back. I won't be stubborn any more. I'll do what's right by both of you."

Tom held out the jewel to her. Amelia stared at it, feeling an abrupt surge of frustrated fury. Only dimly was she aware that he was speaking again.

"I took this from Sue, because I didn't want her wearing it as a symbol of my uselessness. I couldn't have taken care of her, being penniless, and she wouldn't have been happy. This is the best way. . . ."

Amelia shook with her anger. A red mist rose before her eyes. Sue! Always Sue! Everything he did was for Sue—even as to removing the jewel before it had done its deadly work. Suddenly, viciously, Amelia grabbed at the

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thing where it hung from his fingers.

She had it. She felt it clutched tightly in her hand. And then, off balance, she flailed wildly at empty air. The next thing she knew, the stairs were leaping up crazily to meet her, and she was plunging down, down—falling just as she had always feared she would fall. There was a terrible shock—another. Then everything went black.

DR. THAYER looked down at Amelia where she lay in bed, and his round, ruddy face wore a curiously mingled expression of pity and disgust. Amelia's head was swathed in bandages, but she didn't seem to mind. She gazed back at Thayer with eyes that were bright and happy. Her mouth was open in a loose, vacuous smile, and a trickle of saliva ran down one corner of her angular chin.

Dr. Thayer turned away. "There's no doubt about it," he said huskily. "That fall down the stairs did something to her brain. I'm afraid she'll never be the same again."

"How awful!" Sue said. "Poor Amelia!" She buried her face in Tom Vale's coat. Several days had passed since the accident, and Sue had swiftly grown strong enough to walk about unaided.

"If Amelia doesn't show any improvement, I'll have to have her committed to a private sanitorium," Thayer said. "She'll receive proper care, there." Suddenly he brightened. "I had a talk with lawyer Hurley. He told me, in the event that I was sure Amelia could be declared incompetent, that the Blanding estate would revert to Sue. Well, I'm quite sure."

Sue's small face became radiant. "Tom!" she cried. "Do you know what that means?"

Tom Vale nodded slowly. "And I promise not to be stubborn about it. I've caused enough trouble as it is."

On the bed, Amelia gurgled deep in her throat as if in response. Her hands toyed affectionately with the red jewel that hung from a gold chain about her neck.

"She seems attached to that bauble," Thayer observed. "You just can't take it away from her. Well, if it'll keep her happy, she can have it—"

THE END

SECOND CHILDHOOD FOR OIL WELLS

DR. W. L. RUSSELL of Wells Surveys, Inc., Tulsa, presented a paper before the 1942 convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in which he described a new method of locating oil deposits.

For many years oil men have suspected that large oil deposits lay near the wells they had sank but they have also lacked a device for locating these pools to substantiate this belief. This new device can be used for this purpose and will give oil wells that "are dry" a new and useful life.

The device consists of a metal cylinder 9 feet long and 4 inches in diameter which is lowered into a well that has brought up just about all the oil at the bottom. The well is surrounded by limestones, shales, sandstones, salt beds, and many other deposits all of which contain minute quantities of radium and radioactive chemicals that give off gamma rays. Since each of these deposits gives off its own particular number of gamma rays, the cylinder will indicate the various levels at which oil-bearing rock is located by the fact that the type and number of gamma rays produced by this rock are picked up. Engineers then lower other instruments down into the wells to the level indicated by the cylinder and these shoot steel bullets which penetrate the steel sides of the well to enable the oil to rush in.

This process and the instruments used have been successfully tested in our own oil states as well as in South America and should contribute a great deal towards increasing our oil supply and reserves. Moreover, Dr. Russell said that further research was going on to develop an instrument which could locate oil pools at the surface.

—Billy Decker

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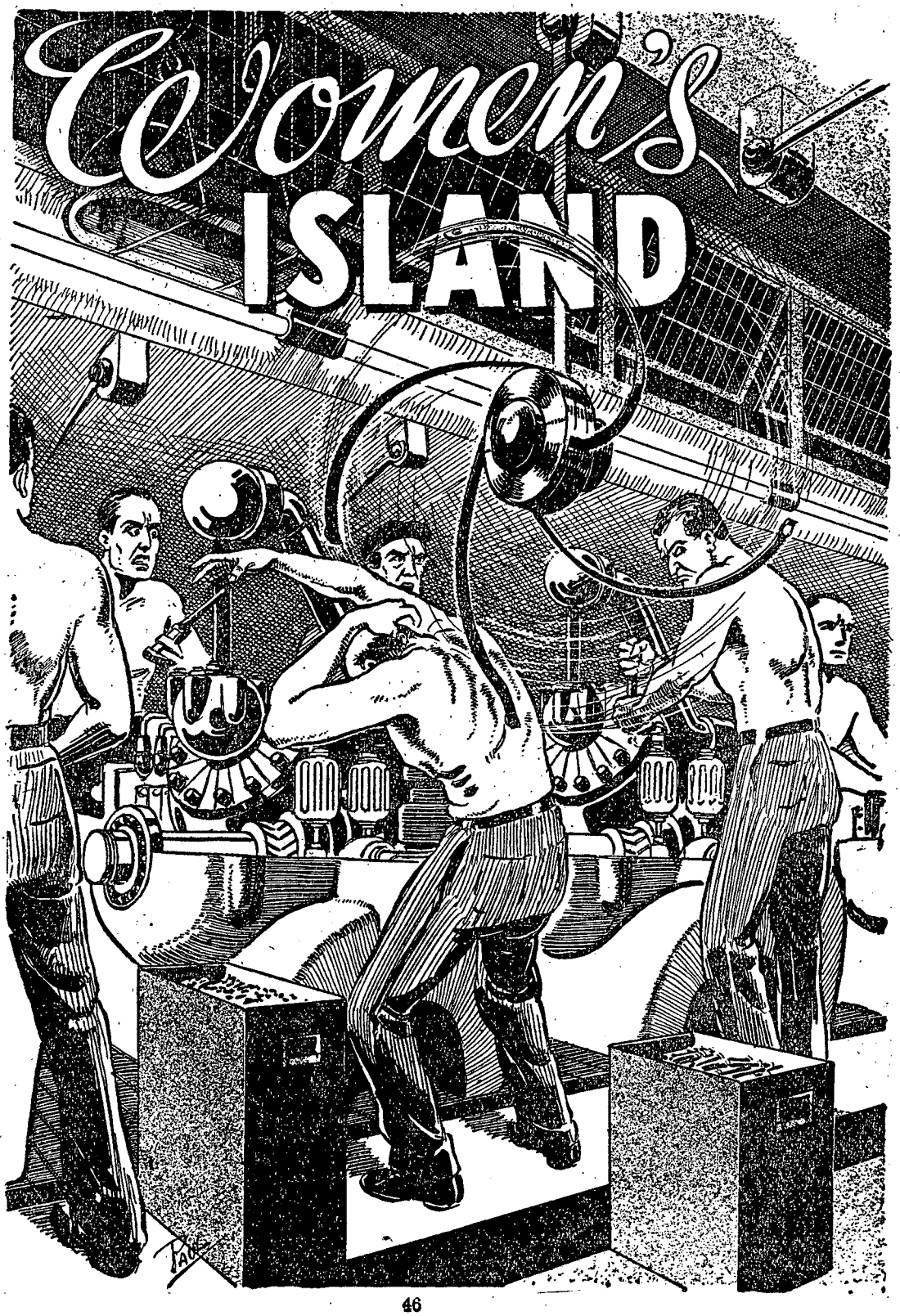

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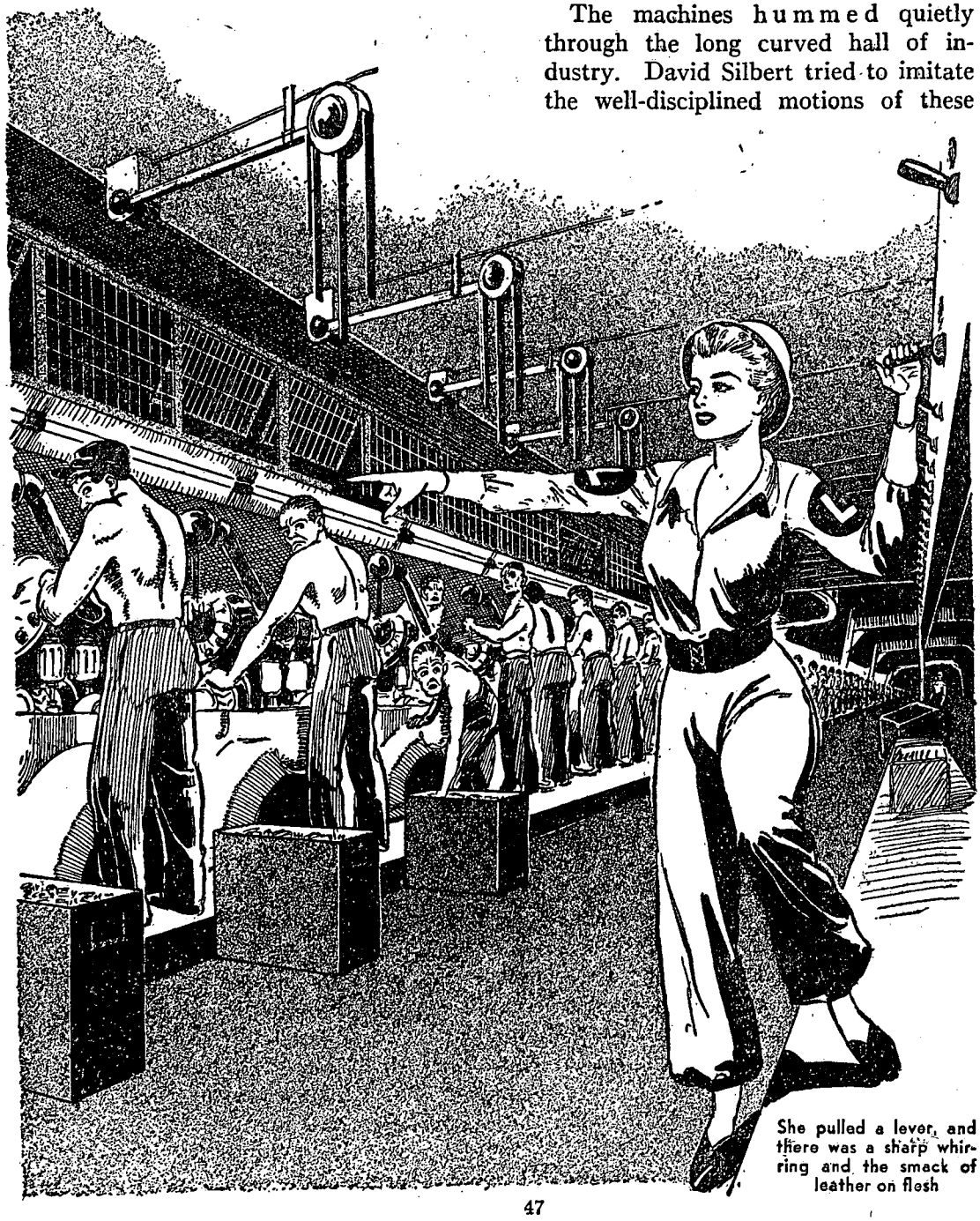
By MILES SHELTON

How about a world run by women? Here was an island where that happened—in an unusual way

DAVID SILBERT had never worked in a factory like this before. The women officials didn't know he was working here now. He meant to get his fill of these strange sights before anyone but Maddox knew he had come to Woman's Island.

The machines hummed quietly through the long curved hall of industry. David Silbert tried to imitate the well-disciplined motions of these



She pulled a lever, and there was a sharp whirring and the smack of leather on flesh

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men at work. Their manner disturbed him. How could they be so machine-like? They never glanced aside, never spoke to each other when they passed.

"And that handsome woman foreman—they didn't even notice her," David Silbert said to himself.

Not that *he* had any interest in women. Personally, he detested all females. His girl friends back home had become the bane of his existence.

A fellow of his handsomeness—square jaw and slender athletic build—had found it possible to fall out of love as fast as he fell in—until he met a certain red-head. However, she had turned the tables on him and fallen out herself, and his tough heart had cracked up like a jig-saw puzzle. Whereupon, he had decided to lose himself in the Pacific. Of all places to arrive, by mere chance—Woman's Island!

Like the other workers, he wore orange slacks and canvas shoes with silent sponge-rubber holes. Like the others, he was bare to the waist. He wondered if his freshly sunburnt back would be conspicuous. Through the long curved room of men and machines, the naked backs were evenly tanned.

Sunlamps overhead apparently accounted for this exhibition of healthy color—an individual violet-white lamp showering over each man. But what *were* those mysterious wheels with the coiled strips of leather that hung directly above each worker?

Twenty feet ahead of him was a slender gray-haired man wearing spectacles. His thin brown arms could barely keep pace with his machine. He would have looked well in an executive's chair, or on a judge's bench. But he wasn't meant for this.

"Something's wrong here," Dave said to himself. "That man's not here from choice. He's a slave."

Dave tried to remember what he had read about Woman's Island. Rumors that had floated north to the United States, by way of the South American mainland, had been sketchy and confused. Newspapers would make humorous reference to "her Majesty, the Empress of Woman's Island," as if she were something legendary.

"A perfect Utopia for women" was the phrase that came to David's mind.

If the ocean-going yacht he had picked up at a "bargain price" had been as seaworthy as claimed, he would still be sailing the Pacific on his one-man exploration of the South American coast. And he would never have known about Woman's Island. Except that, according to reports, it was a little world of its own where woman had come into her rightful glory of dominating man.

But a freakish storm had converted the yacht into a mess of splinters, and David Silbert, lone-wolf adventurer, had been lucky enough to reach this shore in one piece.

Luck had been with him again in his meeting with young Maddox an hour after he had been cast ashore. Young Maddox, not quite twenty-one—four years younger than David, had been a friend in need.

"This is no shore for castaways," Maddox had said, "but I'll hide you until you can get away."

NOW David was watching the handsome lady as she moved slowly along the rows of machines. What would happen if he were discovered working here? He would be lucky if he got away with this ruse, taking the place of a sick man without reporting to the officials. But Maddox had said it was his only chance to get inside the factory. He wondered—

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The lady foreman stopped within a few feet of him. Out of the corner of his eye he could see her gleaming white dress and red sash. She was watching the gray-haired man. He was lagging.

"Why doesn't the fool speed up, at least until she gets by?" David thought. But here, again, he caught that strange feeling. *The gray-haired worker didn't appear to know he was being watched.*

How could he be so insensitive?

The lady foreman whirled to the row of electric switches on the wall. Click.

The wheel spun above the worker's head. A brown leather whip lashed out. The spinning wheel reversed. The whip cracked over the workman's back.

Zing! Zing!—three, four, five, six—

David's blood went cold as he counted the strokes. On *ten,* the workman staggered. Then the handsome lady foreman turned off the switch and sauntered on down the row of machines as if nothing had happened.

The gray-haired workman bowed down to the floor, but only to pick up his spectacles. As mute as a whipped horse, he went back to work. The stripes of red showed in crisscross lines across his back. The streams of sweat went red as they oozed down.

"Machine driven whips! And he goes right on working. How can a human being take it?" David growled savagely to himself. "And no one even noticed! What kind of men can stand by and not even clench their fists?"

David turned a more attentive hand to his own machine, for the lady foreman was returning. His job was the simple but steady process of operating levers to feed raw material to steel jaws. The foreman was watching him. He pretended not to notice. And yet he sensed that she was about to speak to him. Was it possible that she knew every face among these three or four thousand workers? Or had his sunburnt back aroused her suspicions?

A telephone rang, and she returned to the wall.

"No, not yet Miss Blanchard." Her voice was almost masculine. She was a woman of fifty, handsome rather than pretty, David had observed. There was a ruthless strength in her manner—a cool brutality that he now associated with automatic whips. Her gleaming white dress with the blood-red sash became to him a symbol of *cruelty glorified.*

The message that came through the telephone caused the foreman to glance sharply toward the arched entrance.

"No, they haven't arrived, Miss Blanchard . . . Very well, I'll see that they get a good impression. The Empress hasn't anything to worry about."

SHE hung up just as the party of visitors appeared at the main entrance. She surveyed the long hallway to satisfy herself that all the men and machines were operating smoothly. David Silbert breathed with relief. He had been forgotten.

The lady foreman left the party of five women visitors in charge of a young girl attendant and went on about her business.

As the visitors passed David's part of the room, he caught a little of their conversation. It was plain that they were citizens of this island empire. They had come here because they deserved to know how the affairs of their kingdom were being run.

Four of the young women sauntered out of view. The fifth paused to ask the attendant a few questions.

Then it was that David Silbert forgot he was supposed to be operating the machine. He forgot he was a woman-hater. He forgot that every feminine smile in the last two months had repelled him. He stood motionless, gaz-

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ing at the most attractive girl he had ever seen in his life.

She was a lovely girl of about twenty, wearing a cool tan and white sport suit. She had dark brown hair, a rather high forehead, sensitive coral lips. Her lively dark eyes were keen enough to observe everything about her. She questioned the attendant, a friendly little blonde that she called Jane.

"Have you anything new to tell me of these men, Jane? I can't see that they ever change."

"The Empress doesn't want them to change, you know," said the attendant, evidently an old friend.

"Somehow I always come away from this place hating myself, Jane."

"Why, Eudora?"

"I feel so helpless against it all. I'm twenty-one years old, now, Jane. Tonight at the assembly I'll get to vote for the first time. I'm afraid my Aunt Em isn't going to be pleased over the way I vote."

The light of some mysterious purpose shone in Eudora's eyes. David Silbert's thoughts were spinning. Here was someone who saw this factory as he saw it. On quick impulse he thought, "I've got to know her."

Then he whistled. "Hello, there. Could I see you——"

He broke off with a gulp. The look of utter astonishment that struck through Eudora's lovely face *scared* him. It scared him and he wasn't sure why. She was staring, her eyes were wide, puzzled, as if something incredible had happened.

What had he done? He'd spoken out of turn. He'd whistled. A crude thing to do, perhaps. But nothing really shocking. He, if anyone, should be shocked. A hard-hearted woman-hater like him suddenly breaking through two months of resolves! But he couldn't help it. Here was one girl in a million and he knew it. He had to get acquainted.

But something was terribly wrong. She stood, grasping the arm of her little blonde friend, pointing at him as if he were a freak of nature.

"What—what's the meaning of that?" she said.

Her attendant f r i e n d, equally amazed, groped for an answer. But at this unfortunate moment the lady foreman strode up, as if from nowhere. She touched a switch. The wheel over David's head spun, the whip lashed down, it caught him with a cutting stroke that ripped over his back like a knife blade.

Zing-zing-zing-zing.....

CHAPTER II

Murder on the Cliff

WITH a bleeding back that was like a blaze of fire, Dave Silbert dragged himself home from work. He hoped that young Maddox—"Happy," as the family called him—would have some salve and bandages handy.

"If experience is the best teacher, I oughta learn fast," he mumbled to himself.

He avoided the busy streets. When the female military police cruised past in their official car, a limousine outlandishly decorated with imitation gold, he tried to look the other way. He didn't want to attract any eyes. A newcomer in these parts would have some tall explaining to do.

The mellow sun, still high in the afternoon sky, was somehow soothing to his tortured bare back. Or perhaps it was the balmy, semi-tropical air. Under a less strenuous situation he could have liked this island.

The island's cruelties had stung him. He had glimpsed its mysterious treach-

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eries. He reasoned with himself that he had no obligation to stay. He should make plans to shake the sand of its beaches off his feet as soon as possible.

But does any man walk away from a rattlesnake that has struck at him? He may still be free, unpoisoned. He may say to himself, "That rattlesnake is none of my business," and go merrily on his way.

No, no man does that. He seizes stones, he faces his attacker, he fights, heedless of the danger of death. Dave broke off these thoughts with a curious chuckle.

"I'd never thought of comparing women to rattlesnakes before," he mused, "but after twenty-four hours on this island that's how it seems to me."

Everywhere he looked, he was reminded that this was Women's Island. The boulevards were lined with statues of women—gaudily painted statues that took on a semblance of gold in the afternoon sun. Any objects so bright and conspicuous must have had a purpose.

"That's one way of reminding men of their inferiority," he decided. "But nothing can do that better than those infernal whipping machines."

He had learned, in the thick of violence that afternoon, that the whirling whip couldn't be dodged. It spotted you with an electric eye, and swung over you automatically.

The one thing that he regretted more than his own lashing was what he had done to John Dennison, the gray-haired, bespeckled man at the machine ahead of him. It had happened by accident. When the whip began lashing Dave, he had swung his arms up to protect himself. In doing so, he had jerked the loose metal grip off the handle of his left-hand lever.

The steel part had flown up and struck the sunlamp above John Dennison's head. A shower of frosted glass had barely missed the man's back. But the steel had fallen to strike him on the right temple, had knocked him out cold.

For once, the lady foreman had shown some mercy. She had hurried first aid to the elderly man—and Dave had made himself as inconspicuous as possible by going on with his work. He had fully expected a round with the authorities, which would quickly point up to, "Who are you, and where'd you come from, and how do you happen to be taking so-and-so's place at this machine?"

But the lady doctor and the lady foreman had wasted only a passing glance on him, and one of them had commented that it was strange that some of these factory workers would sometimes revert to their original high-energy state.

ON REACHING the gate of the Maddox home, Dave Silbert stopped. A small boy was sitting on the steps, talking with two lady callers —no other than Jane and Eudora. Again the sight of Eudora's beauty fairly took Dave's breath away. He crouched back of the hedge, listened.

"Happy's not here," the little boy insisted. He was Danny Downs, a next door neighbor, and he knew Happy Maddox wasn't at home. "I'm Happy's best friend, and he tells me everything."

"I'm Happy's friend, too, Danny," Jane said, smiling pleasantly.

The stubborn little fellow drew back defensively. "No girls are friends to men."

Jane turned to her companion, shaking her head slowly.

"Don't mind him," Eudora consoled her. "The boy doesn't mean any harm. It just goes to prove what I was saying. The Empress is poisoning every mind on the island, from the oldest to the

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youngest. I could be hanged for saying that, but it's true."

Jane turned back to the little neighbor boy and tried to pat him on the shoulder, but he writhed at her touch.

"Goodbye, Danny," she said. "When you see Happy, just tell him that I brought a visitor from the factory. We wanted to tell him about something very unusual that happened today."

Dave's heart leaped. *He* was the unusual thing that had happened at the factory. Did he dare step out of hiding and try to explain? No, he had fouled his luck once today by acting on rash impulse. He froze to his hiding place and waited until the two girls had gone on their way.

A minute later, then, he and little Danny Downs were getting acquainted like long lost brothers. Danny ran into the Maddox house and got some salve and dressing for Dave's back. The bright-eyed little fellow talked as big as any doctor.

"I didn't dare tell those females where Happy went, because I don't tell females nothing. But Happy said I could tell you anything. Come here."

Danny led the way to the south end of the porch and pointed across to the southeast where a white cliff arose against the blue ocean half a mile away.

"If you round that cliff," Danny said, "you'll find him. But you'd better watch your step. There's trouble over there. Say, where'd you come from anyhow?"

"From the United States."

"My folks came from there. What are you doing here, anyhow?"

"The sea tossed me ashore, Danny. But we'll discuss that later. If Happy Maddox is in trouble, I'm heading for that cliff."

"He wouldn't tell me what it was about, but I figure it's something gosh-awful important."

"See you later, Danny."

THE sirens sounded before Dave reached his destination. He dropped to the sand. Through a line of vegetation he could see the motorcycle brigade approaching the white cliff. Five of the female police rode straight for the crest of the hill. Three swung to the southwest, out of sight. The remaining three branched off to the east, about a hundred yards ahead of him. Their black and gold uniforms flashed through the rays of the lowering sun.

Dave had not been seen. He had been left out of their net. He might have run the other way. But if there was any chance at all to warn Happy Maddox—

He sprinted along the flat sand. Far ahead, from around the curve of the cliff, the angry sirens whined.

Now he ducked for cover. The first outcropping of rocks at the foot of the cliff offered him a place to catch his breath. The shady stone touched cool against his painful back.

Someone was sliding through the narrow crevice a few yards ahead. He could see the figure moving stealthily among the blue shadows. He heard the quiet shuffling of stones under the man's careful tread. Then Dave saw that it was Happy Maddox!

"H-ss-t! Maddox! It's me—Dave Silbert."

Happy turned his frightened face to Dave. Slowly the lines of terrorism eased. "Oh, it's you. Come over. We're safer here . . . Listen!"

Three gunshots echoed along the rocky walls.

"I knew it was coming. I knew it!" Happy muttered. His round, jovial face was anything but happy now.

His icy tension reflected to Dave. Whatever this daring scheme was, it had run smack into tragedy. Now the guns were sounding again.

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"It's the devil to pay. They'll never get away. The whole escape plan went off half-cocked. The sculptor—he's temperamental—he was determined to escape this island. I tried to warn them."

BY EDGING their way through the rocks they caught a few glimpses of the fight in its final stages. Dave saw the figures of two men floating face down in the water. He saw two police women conducting a hand-cuffed figure—a tall, slightly stooped man in white—back toward a black-and-gold police car on the crest of the hill.

"They've captured the sculptor," Happy growled.

But there was still gunplay that neither Dave nor Happy could see—until—

"There it goes, Dave. The speedboat. Someone's making a dash for it. But what's the use, now that they've got the sculptor! Still, if they can save the boat—"

But the little homemade speedboat didn't get away. The bold gunman at the wheel lost the game when his bullets ran out. One woman cop raced ahead of the others and hurled some sort of grenade. The gunman dived.

Blang! The hand bomb exploded over the prow. The boat blew up like a firecracker.

When the splinters showered down on the water, the gunman was there, too. He wasn't swimming. He was a part of the wreckage that would never be salvaged.

Dave turned to Happy Maddox. "I suppose you're next on their list."

"I don't know," said Happy. "I wasn't in on the plot, really. All I did was come out to warn them, a few minutes ago, that the cops had been tipped off. I was too late."

"Who *is* this sculptor? What'll they do with him?"

Happy blew a painful breath through his pursed lips. "The Empress will probably hang him. There's a session of court coming up tonight. All the women voters will be there. They'll pass judgment—"

"I'll be there, too," Dave said. "I want to see how a girl named Eudora votes."

"You can't go. It's only for the women. Men don't have any voice in the government."

"I'll be there," said Dave.

CHAPTER III

Trial by Empress

THE last glint of sunset was on the gold statues, and they should have been at the height of their day's beauty—if they possessed any beauty whatsoever.

Their weirdness fascinated David Silbert as he moved warily along the curved street toward the government pavilion.

"It would have been a beautiful street without the statues," he thought. "I wonder what the sculptor is like, to design these affairs and then try to escape the island."

He sauntered to the center of the boulevard to inspect one of the objects. Its base was formed of figures of a number of workmen crouching upon their knees, their heads bowed down. Upon their backs rested the table of stone upon which the central figure was mounted. In every case that central figure was a woman. Central figures came in a variety of poses, but the most popular represented an attitude of command. Standing in the presence of one of these, David could fairly hear the stern orders issue from her frozen lips.

It was difficult to tell of what material

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the statues were made. Outwardly, however, they were all golden. Vast quantities of gaudy paint seemed to have found a place on every object of civic pride, from the police wagons to the dome that crowned the Empress' own palace.

Two men were polishing the gold paint around the base of the statue just beyond, and Dave took his curiosity to them.

"Who *is* this statue?"

"That's the Empress. Gee, buddy, where you been all these years? Don't you know every one of these twelve figures along *this* boulevard is the Empress?"

Dave wondered if she was really six feet tall, or if that was simply the sculptor's exaggeration. All of the figures were nearly life size, though the gilt paint and the ornate bases gave them the appearance of being larger.

"We'll have to repaint these next week," one of the men was saying. "It don't take much weather until the clay starts showing through. I believe in giving the government what it wants."

As Dave hurried on, he observed a similarity in the hawklike features of the whole line of figures.

The face reminded him of a vulture—the eyes, the curved beak of a nose, the savage mouth. Within an hour he was seeing her in person, *the one and only Sophia Regalope, Empress of Woman's Island.*

He had schemed his way into the pavilion by the rear entrance, and had earned a disguising cap and jacket by assisting a stage hand. Now the pavilion stage was in order, the crowd of women gathered, and he and the stage hand sat back in the wings to watch the proceedings.

High excitement was in the air. From the anxious whispers among the women voters, Dave knew that the news of the afternoon's killings had already gone the rounds.

Ten pretty teen-age girls in gold and white uniforms marched down the aisle like drum majorettes and stood at attention in front of the stage. This was the sign that the Empress was entering, and every woman in the audience stood.

THEY were an ardent bunch of patriots, Dave thought. Most of them were wearing some bright gold and black ornaments on their white dresses, doubtless badges of their special offices. Were they all completely loyal to this ideal of woman's supremacy? He wondered. And at that moment as he glanced to the end seat in the front row, his eyes caught Eudora's.

She was standing at attention, like the rest, for now the Empress, in all her gaudy finery, was coming slowly toward the stage. But what was Eudora thinking?

Her keen dark eyes gazed straight to the wings where he was sitting in the shadows. Her pretty head nodded ever so slightly. She recognized him! His pulse leaped.

So she knew that he was the one who had been whipped that afternoon. What did that mean to her? She must have guessed that he was no regular factory worker, that he was an impostor.

He returned her slight nod, he touched his fingers to his lips, as if to say, "Yes, I'm a stranger here, but please don't give me away."

All he got in return was a hint of a puzzled expression. After all, she had no reason to think him worthy of any confidence. But if she had known that he had overheard her remarks about the Empress—

The one and only Sophia Regalope now ascended the stage steps. She was puffing slightly under the weight of all

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manner of gilt ornaments. Somehow she reminded Dave of a steam caliope at the circus, all painted and polished in black and gold. The gold-painted wooden beads that hung as huge epaulets from her shoulders clattered like clothespins when she turned to face her audience.

"Women of the Government," she began in a large, tremulous voice, "the first matter of business for tonight concerns . . ."

Dave was far more interested in the Empress herself than in the routine business. She was the vulture of the statues, all right, but the sculptor had been merciful to her. For example, the statue faces had omitted the conspicuous wart on the right side of her nose. They had softened the avarice of her lips. They could never have portrayed the lust for power that burned in her eyes.

The wart on the nose, Dave decided, was the least offensive of her features. And yet she had formed a habit—long ago, no doubt—to protect that wart from critical eyes. As she stood there talking, gesturing with her right hand, she would reach across with her left and cover the wart with her finger.

But her audience of loyal females was polite enough to ignore this gesture. She was the Empress.

The stage hand whispered to Dave, "Have you seen her husband?"

"I don't think so."

"She keeps him on a leash like an onery dog. Have you seen her palace?"

"From a distance," said Dave. He recalled the wide, facade with all the brummagem carvings, and the high gold dome which rose above every other edifice in the city.

The stage hand said, "That little bullet-headed man that spends his days shining the dome—that's her husband. She keeps him chained up there. It's her little joke that he has the 'highest' job in the city. It's a joke because everybody knows he's the lowest worm."

FROM these low whisperings Dave learned that the Empress herself had been the original genius back of this island colony. When the citizens came, many years before, to set up their community, her poor deluded husband had given his full support to what he considered a noble experiment in women's rights.

"So he's the prize sap," the cynical stage hand concluded. "It gives every woman a feeling of power to see him chained up there on the dome. It proves that a man's good will can be turned into slavery."

The meeting hurried through several items of routine business, most of which the Empress dispatched in the manner of a dictator.

Now she called for a reception of any new voters—women who had turned twenty-one since the last meeting. Eudora and four others arose.

"Young ladies, it's a sacred privilege to vote in a women's government," the Empress said. "Let me emphasize to you the importance of keeping our traditions. . . ."

For a moment Eudora's sharp eyes glanced past the Empress to catch Dave's gaze. This advice from the high and mighty Sophia Regalope was poison to Eudora! She was virtually being ordered to do *no* thinking for herself, to vote as other women voted. She and the other four bowed submissively and sat down.

A few minutes later, then the breath-taking final event of the evening began.

"Bring in the accused!" the Empress ordered.

She sat back in the high-backed gilt chair, folded her jeweled arms, and waited for the women police to arrange

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the court and set the trial in motion.

Reginald Keith was a broken man. He was fifty, according to the reading of the court records, but he looked older. A few hours earlier, Dave had seen him, a stooped silhouette against the sky, as the policewoman had led him away from the cliffs in handcuffs.

Now he sat with head bowed, his thin sensitive fingers pressed against his gray cheeks. So he was the artist who had molded all these statues, Dave thought. From the maniacal light in his deep-set eyes it would seem that he was a wild, untamed spirit, fighting to escape some unseen trap.

The Empress rose and pointed an accusing finger. "So you don't like your own statues. You, of all people. You were brought here to portray our ideals. And now you say you hate everything you've done. That's the foulest treason anyone has ever uttered on this island."

The stage hand nudged Dave and whispered, "She should hear her husband when he gets started."

The Empress turned to the audience. "Does any woman here have anything to say for the accused before we come to a decision?"

Eudora rose. "I think the accused should have a chance to speak for himself."

The audience fell deadly silent. This was unprecedented, for a new voter to speak up so boldly.

The sculptor came to his feet eagerly. "Yes, please let me explain—"

"Sit down!" the Empress snapped. "As for you, Miss Eudora, if you have any opinion to express, proceed."

Eudora started toward the platform, but a sharp gesture from the Empress told her to stay where she was.

She spoke calmly. "Fellow citizens, I think we should remember that Mr. Keith has worked faithfully ever since he came here. He has built the statues exactly as he has been told to build them. *If he thinks they are bad, whose fault is it?*"

The Empress went white with anger, and the wooden beads on her shoulders quivered.

"Miss Eudora, are you saying that our beautiful statues are *not* beautiful?"

"I didn't say that."

"But do you think it?"

"I am not on trial," Eudora replied quietly. "I am only concerned with the sincerity of Reginald Keith's rebellion against his own work. *He* is the artist. If he is driven to escape this island because he can't endure the sight of his works, *I think he should have the right to escape.*"

Eudora spoke with such conviction that a few women started to applaud. The frenzied sculptor sprang from his chair, speaking excitedly.

"That's what I wanted to say. I can't stand the sight of shabby art—"

Crack!

He stopped with an outcry. A whip had lashed out from the hand of a police woman and struck him across the forehead. White with pain, he sank down and bowed his head.

The Empress would listen to no more remarks. She cut the trial short in her own characteristic way.

"The evidence of high crime against our laws is so clear that I need not call for a vote. This man, by his words, has outraged the symbols of woman's glory. I convict him of treason and *sentence him to be hanged.*"

The sculptor's head remained bowed.

CHAPTER IV

John Dennison, Guinea Pig

DAVE worked at the factory every day during the two weeks that followed. The sunlamp above his ma-

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chine showered healing rays over his back. The whip marks faded, a deep tan covered the upper half of his body.

He signed up as a regular and the factory authorities accepted him. They warned him to be ready to explain his presence to the Empress. She would get around to questioning him after the other excitement died down. But the police had established that his coming had nothing to do with the sculptor's plot, so for the present he was left to his own devices.

At once this freedom, coupled with his spirit of adventure, carried him deeper and deeper into the mysteries of this curious world.

Not content to see the Empress' chained-up husband from a distance, he secured a pass through the palace lobby and climbed the tower to talk with that "lowest worm."

"Get away while you can," was the one piece of advice that the dome-polisher had to offer. "Get out of the factory before it gets you."

"The work doesn't tire me," said Dave, "and it gives me a right to stay here, apparently. Why should I get out?"

"You'll go *dopey*, just like those other worms. Don't ask me how or why. They were bright young fellows like you once."

The visit was depressing. This small, bullet-headed man was a pitiful case. Once he had been a social theorist, willing to try any social order that might make people happier. Yes, he had hoped to make the world a brighter, shinier place, and here he was, with a polishing cloth in his hand.

IN THE factory Dave picked up very little gossip. No one seemed concerned about the approaching date of a hanging. These worms of men had lost all desire for human responsibility. Only John Dennison became an exception to this rule.

"How are you feeling, Dennison?" Dave would ask each day at the lunch hour.

"Better . . . better." The slender gray-haired man would move down the food line, taking each dish that was offered—for the factory dining room allowed no choice. But for some reason, he was showing a keener interest than other workers in what he ate, how it tasted, how it agreed with him.

"Sometimes I wonder if this factory food is the best thing for us," he would say. Then he would eat in silence, and Dave, sitting across the table from him, would study his face and his manners.

"You use a lot of salt," Dave observed.

"Salt—yes—of a sort. I carry my own supply." Dennison sifted the small green salt shaker over his plate until the food looked frosted. Then he returned the shaker to his pocket. "I'm experimenting," he said.

"How long have you been doing this?"

"For several months. They've had me try several different kinds of powders. Of all the things they give me—"

"They?"

Dave tried to pursue this hint, but John Dennison shook his head.

"I shouldn't be talking so much."

"I wish you'd tell me everything," said Dave. "I'd like to help, to make up for that injury I did you when the steel flew out of my hands."

Dennison removed his spectacles and knitted his gray eyebrows thoughtfully.

"I've been wondering, Silbert, if that bump didn't do me some good. It seems to me I've been seeing things a little clearer ever since."

Dave considered. He knew that this man had been living in a stupid, dreamy state, not alert to anything. If a bump

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on the head could actually restore him from such a tragedy, a lot of these drowsy worms could stand a bump on the head.

The handsome woman foreman in the gleaming white dress and red sash kept a suspicious eye on Dave. Under pressure he learned to feign the worm-like actions that were expected of him. But when she touched the electric switches and the whips zinged down to spur some lagging workman, Dave was always on nerve's edge.

Occasionally he would overhear her telephone calls to the superintendent, or to Miss Blanchard, secretary to the Empress.

"Miss Blanchard, will you please speak to the Empress about this new worker? I don't think he's responding to treatment. . . . What evidence? He's too sensitive over other people's whippings. Much too sensitive. . . No, I'm not at all satisfied that our method is working on him. . . ."

Then she would lower her voice, and his curiosity would be left in the air.

EVERY day Dave awoke wondering if the factory fate had struck him. Somehow he had expected it to hit quickly, like a hypodermic. But toward the end of the second week it occurred to him that it might be enveloping him gradually. He noticed a few symptoms. A dull imagination. A craving for more sleep.

"Outside of working hours, I'm much too sleepy," he confessed to Happy Maddox one evening. "Either this tropical air is getting me or else—"

"You'd better get out of that factory."

"But how does that account for it?"

"If you find out, tell the Underground. They've been working on it for months. They're using John Dennison for a guinea pig. I just heard about it recently. This girl named Eudora—Jane was telling me about her."

Dave was suddenly alert. He had been trying for days to get in touch with her. He had repeatedly written notes and slipped them to Jane at the factory. But it was risky for a factory attendant to get involved with workers.

He guessed that his messages had gone to the wastebasket.

"All I know," Happy went on, "is that there's a powder keg under this island and I'd like to help explode it. It's an explosion that has been slowly gathering, but just in the last few months has it become organized into a regular underground. Eudora is one of the leaders. I'm going to a meeting soon. I'll take you along."

CHAPTER V

The High Cost of Marriage

THE first underground meeting that Dave attended was held on the southeast end of the island where the dim fires were hidden by the cliffs. In the glow of red coals, the eyes of these young men and women took on a weird, haunted look. There were thirty-five persons present, and most of them were under twenty-one.

But John Dennison was here, standing quietly at the edge of the crowd. Everyone was interested to know how his medicines were affecting him. The underground movement began to take on meaning for Dave. One of its purposes, at least, was to lift the curse that held over the factory workers.

The one person who was conspicuously absent was Happy's girl friend, Jane.

"She's never come to any of our meetings," someone mentioned. "Haven't you any influence with her, Happy?"

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Happy smiled at this. The important question was whether she had any influence with the Empress.

"You see, Jane and I are about to ask the government for the supreme favor—passage to the United States."

A chorus of *oh's* greeted this announcement. It implied that he and Jane were planning to get married.

The group wished Happy all the luck in the world, but most of them realized his peril. Three bullet-riddled corpses had been buried recently. Happy was still alive and free only by the grace of good luck.

"You'd better take the first boat," some of his friends advised. "In fact, you'd do well to follow Jane's example and stay away from us. There's no telling when the police will get wind of our meetings."

Eudora concurred in this opinion. "It isn't only *your* danger, but Jane's as well. I've been talking with her. It's an awful strain for any girl to pretend she and her sweetheart are loyal to the government, when they're really not."

"They *can't* be loyal and be in love," one of the girls said.

"That's exactly the point," Eudora declared. "To the Empress, love is a sham."

"We realize that." Happy spoke as if his wide-eyed little blonde were right with him. The mystery is that the Empress ever gives permission for any couples to leave the island to get married."

"How do we know," Eudora asked, "that she does give them *safe* passage? I don't trust her any farther than the first wave on the water."

THIS brought a deathly silence, for there was no answer. In the firelight, Dave saw many of the group glance at old John Dennison.

Dave was to learn the meaning of this in the course of the conversation. Of the twenty-odd couples who had gained passage to the United States in the last few years, *none had ever written letters back to the island*. John Dennison's own son and daughter-in-law-to-be had gone back two years ago. At the time, Dennison had thanked the Empress profusely. But with the passing months, he had grown heart-sick over the deal. For never did he receive one word of communication from the newlyweds.

That was what had led to Dennison's slavery in the factory. He had been a patient and cooperative citizen. But after the silence of his departed son and bride, he began to air his suspicions. The Empress heard about it. Right away he found himself tending a machine and turning into a "worm."

Now around the firelight the beautiful Eudora fascinated the group with a little informal talk.

The red coals glowed within her reach, and with a stick of wood she separated three of them from the rest of the fire.

"Here, my lads and lassies, are the things that may happen to us young folks at the hands of our Empress when we want to get married."

Her easy smile did not lessen her seriousness. Everyone watched her.

"At the first rumor that any of you are in love, you know what the Empress does. She sends you sharp warnings. She tries to crush the idea out of your heart."

With the stick Eudora tapped one of the coals until the red glow was gone out of it.

"If this succeeds, the young man may be bluffed out for life. He may bend his will henceforth to the government. The girl may become another champion of women's rule. After that, their love is never revived."

"But some of us are not going to be bluffed out," said a young man at

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Dave's elbow.

"In that case, the Empress spots you. And you know what usually happens as soon as you are twenty-one." Eudora sifted a handful of earth over the second glowing coal. "You are ordered into the factory. You turn into a worm. Your social impulses fade away."

One bright coal at the fire's edge still glowed.

Eudora pointed to it.

"Here are the few couples who think themselves very fortunate. These beg the Empress to *bless* their marriage. And she *seems* to relent, and promises them passage across the sea, where their love ideals won't contaminate her government."

Here Eudora took a cup of water.

"Tonight, as Happy and Jane are hoping for this favor, every one of us are wondering whether the other couples in the years past—twenty of them—ever got to the mainland. *Or whether they may have been drowned on the way.*"

She poured the water over the remaining coal.

CHAPTER VI

David Becomes a Worm

FOR a long time nobody spoke. The low fire brightened as a wisp of sea breeze played over it, then dulled to a faint reddish gloom. Someone tossed a bit of paper into it. The flare-up showed the white ashes all around—about the color of old John Dennison's thoughtful face.

"There are a few men who go along whenever the Empress sends the boat across," Dennison commented. "We might learn something if we ever dared exchange confidences."

This matter was discussed, but not hopefully. The Empress' own husband usually made each trip, to keep the rails polished. Then there were certain engineers. The sculptor, too, had cruised with the boat as a matter of course. In fact, he was nearly always on it, whether it was docked, or voyaging, or skirting the farthest point of the island so that he could gather a certain quality of clay for his statues.

"We'll never have a chance for a word with the sculptor now," said John Dennison. "They'll hang him in a few days. In the meantime they'll watch him like a hawk."

Happy spoke up. "It wouldn't surprise me if the Empress would delay that hanging on some pretext."

"Why?"

"Jane thinks that she had already planned two more statues for the north end of Center Street. Keith may get to live until he finishes them."

This kindled new fires of hope. If the time came that Reginald Keith was to mount two more statues in the street, there might be a chance to pull an escape act. The voices around the dying coals lowered to eager whispers. New schemes were in the mold.

And among the schemes, John Dennison, who had been a stupid worm only a few days before, was making his contribution. It was amazing how swiftly he was improving all at once.

"If you need someone who looks like Keith," Dennison said, "I'm about his size and build. I'm gray-haired. I could put on his sculptor's smock. I could imitate his stoop. Anything to give them the slip."

Happy shook his head slowly. "We'll never get away with anything. Jane told me that they had a gun on him all the time he was on the stage for the trial."

"Then he *must* know too much," said Eudora.

When the meeting ended, Happy hur-

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ried away from the crowd. It was late. Jane would be waiting for him.

The walk back to the city through the darkness was a pleasant one for Dave. He fell into step with Eudora, remarking that he needed guidance over this strange territory and that she seemed to be a good leader.

"We're glad to have you helping us, Mr. Silbert—"

" 'Dave' if you don't mind," he said.

"I saw you take that whipping." Her voice touched on a note of compassion. "That was the first time I ever saw you. I couldn't believe—" Her seriousness broke with a little laugh. "I couldn't believe that any factory 'worm' would whistle at me. They're just not interested, you know."

"This factory malady is a hellish thing," he said. "But if it comes over me—let it come. I want to know what's happening."

"It'll get you if you keep working there."

"I think it's started to get me already."

SHE took his arm. It was friendly of her to walk along with him that way in the darkness. They came to a tiny brook at the edge of town. He picked her up gently and lifted her over.

"It hasn't got you yet, Mr. Silbert," she said, and he could see a mischievous twinkle in her keen dark eyes.

"When it gets me, I'll be Mr. Silbert to you. Meanwhile, the name is Dave."

They watched their shadows as they passed under the streetlights. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning. The police cars weren't cruising the streets at this sleepy hour. Eudora seemed much gayer and more girlish than Dave had seen her before. She led the way across to a statue in the center of the street.

"I wonder how I would look in that gold dress, David."

"I'm sorry. It just wouldn't become you. That imitation stuff is fit for nobody but the Empress."

"Look, David, my shadow is almost the same size as the statue lady."

"Shall I life you up on the pedestal?"

He did so, and when he lifted her down again, he held her in his arms for a long moment. Somehow he forgot all about being a woman hater. Somehow he forgot that the smiles of several attractive girls in the past few months had repelled him. Somehow everything was different in this magic hour. He wanted to kiss Eudora, and he did.

She was looking at him then. Not angrily, but questioningly. He smiled at her.

"You see," he said—as if any such halting explanation were necessary, "if this factory curse *does* get me, I'm curious to see whether I'll remember any of the important things—like this."

WITHIN two weeks the factory curse was on him completely.

When the quiet rains fell over Woman's Island, he had to be reminded by Happy to take an umbrella.

When Eudora came over after his working day to talk to him, he paid no attention to her. He fell asleep in his chair.

On the morning of the hanging, he listened to a little of the talk among the people around him in the city square. He heard them say that the Empress had put a stop to the rumors. She was not postponing the execution. If she wanted more statues, she could find other sculptors beyond the sea.

But all this talk meant nothing to Dave Silbert.

Before his eyes was the long, frail, slightly stooped figure of a man hanging from the scaffold. Talkative women were looking at that figure, commenting

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on the white mask on the face or the limp white artist's smock that still clung to the shoulders.

But none of this aroused any feelings in David Silbert. He walked on to the factory and took his place at his machines. *He had become a "worm."*

CHAPTER VII

The Guinea Pig Has Ideas

DAVE had the vaguest notion that the Underground was worried about him. He attended the meetings with Happy, and more often than not he found himself being wakened out of a dreamless sleep and told that it was time to go home.

He hardly remembered what the meetings were about. He sensed that everyone was worried and agitated, but he didn't see why.

Much of their agitation was about him. They liked him. Most of them had advised him weeks before, to get out of the factory, before its tragedy descended on him. Vaguely he remembered that he had refused to quit, that he had stayed at his machine with a dogged determination to learn for himself what this ugly curse was like.

And then, with the strange disappearance of John Dennison, he had made them know that *he* would take Dennison's place. He would be the guinea pig. They must go on with their experiments. He had nothing to lose.

When had Dennison disappeared? Dave couldn't remember. But it was true that Dennison's machine had been left idle at the factory for several days.

The lady foreman had talked of having Dave take it over. He didn't care. Nothing made any difference.

That's how it was when he walked home from the Underground meetings. Sometimes Eudora would walk with him. He didn't care whether she did or not. She would keep asking him questions about how he felt and what he knew.

"I know that I'm here," he would say. "Is there anything else I ought to know?"

"Are you taking the powders with your food?" she would ask.

"I forgot again today," he might say. "Maybe I'll remember tomorrow."

They seemed terribly anxious about him, and they were troubled when he didn't carry out his guinea-pig directions. John Dennison's disappearance had left them in an awful hole.

Then there came a day, less than two weeks after the handsome lady foreman had shifted him to John Dennison's machine, that he began to feel a change.

EUDORA came over to visit with him on the Maddox porch steps, and when her hand touched his, he felt an old familiar gladness to be with her.

"Where have you been all this time?" he asked.

"Are you being funny? I've seen you almost every day . . . Dave! You're giving me that same look you gave me that first time I saw you."

"By George, I'm feeling different. . . . Gee, I'd forgotten how beautiful you were. Tell me, Eudora, what happened to John Dennison?"

"Nobody knows, Dave. We've searched everywhere."

"Do you think I'm going through the same thing he went through?"

"The very same cycle. I'm sure. It may be the medicines. It may be something else. If we can find out for sure, think what it will mean! We'll be able to free all of those three thousand workers! What do you think that would do to the Empress and her hateful government?"

Dave wasn't used to thinking. Worms

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didn't think. But now that thoughts were coming back to him, he was burning with a hundred curiosities at once.

"If I go through the same cycle as John Dennison, does that mean I'll disappear, too?"

"What a frightful thought!" Eudora's face reflected a deep worry at this suggestion. But already Dave was turning to other novel thoughts.

"Eudora, what is the truth about these couples who get the Empress' permission to go back to the United States?"

"No one knows, why?"

"Come with me," Dave said. "I've a scheme for finding out."

He took her hand and they strolled along the sidewalk. She waited for him to talk. For a moment he paused, gazing at the gold statue where one night they had kissed.

"I remember that statue," he said, catching her smile. Then, "Speaking of the Empress and the couples she sends—er—ah—you wouldn't be falling in love?"

It was a very blunt question, and Eudora came back at him with a very business-like answer. "I'm afraid not. You see, I've become a voter. My arguments may carry some weight in meetings—*until* I myself fall in love."

Dave nodded. "Just what I expected. Okay, you and I are in the same boat. I am—believe it or not—a woman hater."

He disregarded the faint smile at the corner of her lips.

"Consequently," he concluded, "you and I are the ideal couple to try my plan. We're both immune to love—so—come on!"

"Where are you going?"

"To see the Empress. We're going to put on an act and carry on a personal investigation."

CHAPTER VIII

The Empress Defied

THE Empress was wearing a gold dress covered with black glass beads. She was preoccupied with directing a battery of stenographers, and Dave guessed that she might be trying to locate a new sculptor.

She turned her hawk-like glare on Eudora and said, "You're that trouble maker. *Well?*" Then she saw Dave. "Oh—*you.*"

For a split second her brutal manner fled. She put her finger to the wart on her nose—perhaps a feminine impulse to hide her ugliness in the presence of a handsome young man.

But with a regal toss of her head she was restored to her normal, cruel self.

"Sit down," she said. Then she swaggered back and forth in front of them. The glass beads on her dress clinked. Epaulets of wooden beads flopped at her shoulders when she whirled about. "You don't have to tell me what you came for. I can guess."

"We want to leave this island, your Majesty," Eudora said. "We want to get married. We came to ask you for safe passage—"

"You're too late. Who told you the boat was leaving tonight?" the Empress snapped.

Dave almost jumped out of his chair. Tonight? He and Eudora hadn't known that. This bluff might go farther than they had intended.

But Eudora, with her usual calmness, gave no sign of surprise. Only a slight pressure from her elbow told him that she, too, was thinking fast.

"Isn't it true that you sometimes grant this favor?" she was saying to the Empress. "How could we earn it?"

This question led the way to others. With the skill of a diplomat, Eudora

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tried to probe the mysteries of brides and grooms. The Empress parried. She dodged questions. Her anger mounted.

MEANWHILE, Dave studied the bit of mirrored seacoast, reflected to him from the glass of an open north window. The evening twilight deepened over the leaden blue expanse of water. The Empress' boat, a small white freighter with accommodations for a few passengers, was already slowly moving out of the narrow bay. Nearer at hand, a motored launch was tying up at the inlet just beyond the inner palace garden. It had just returned, Dave knew, from taking a last load of passengers or mail to the departing *S. S. Regalope.*

Did he and Eudora dare carry their bold hoax far enough to get aboard? The answers they sought might be found on that boat. If 'safe passages' for lovers were a death trap, someone on that ship could be made to tell.

The Empress turned to Dave. "So you're the young whippersnapper I've been hearing about. You drift ashore like a lost fish. What *are* you, a spy? Or a newspaper man? You've got quite a habit of sticking your nose in other people's business. I should have had you jailed when they first reported you."

"If you'll give Eudora and me safe passage, I'll never come back to bother you any more," Dave said, meeting her searching eyes.

"Hmm. That's a pretty promise." The Empress raised her vulture eyebrows as if saying to herself, "Indeed you *won't* come back."

She turned to one of her secretaries. "Bring me the records of David Silbert, factory worker."

While her head was turned, Dave whispered to Eudora. "Look at the window. The boat. . . . If Happy and Jane had known it was leaving tonight—"

There was no time to say more. The Empress turned on Dave and confronted him with his case history.

"Who do you think you are, you young sea tramp? What do you mean, coming to this island and corrupting our high ideals?"

Dave blinked. Did she know he had joined the Underground? "How have I corrupted any ideals?"

"By falling in love with this girl," said the Empress.

Dave folded his arms like a sphinx. "My *dear* Empress, ever since time began—"

"You'll address me as 'Your Majesty'!"

"Your Majesty!" Dave was angering, and the slight nudge from Eudora didn't restrain him. "Your Majesty, ever since time began, and women have been falling in love—"

"L o v e!" the Empress snarled. "There's no such thing as love. It's a word. A myth. It doesn't mean a thing. It's a trick to make men the masters of women. But I've done away with all that. I've proved that love is as dead as—as that man I hanged from the scaffold."

Dave took advantage of this furious outburst. He changed his tactics. Assuming an easy smile, stroking his chin slowly, he said. "Your majesty, it's too bad that *your* marriage turned out to be a disappointment. If the right man had only come your way—"

"Silence!" The Empress fairly shrieked. Her vulture face turned purplish white with rage.

THE four armed policewomen who stood guard at the entrance of this room looked to the Empress for their cue. Dave knew his insult must have struck hard. Would he be thrown into

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prison at once?

The Empress, regaining her composure, again consulted his work record.

"This card indicates that you have been working in the factory several weeks," she said.

"Ever since I came."

She narrowed her eyes at him. Why wasn't he a stupid worm like the others? Something was wrong here. He wasn't responding to treatment.

She said, "I don't understand a factory worker's behaving the way you do. I've had several reports from the superintendent that you're not falling into line like the others."

"Maybe I overcame your doped food," he said defiantly. "Maybe the others will overcome it too."

"Doped food! Do you think *that's* what makes those workers worms? Is that your best guess?" She gave him a mocking laugh.

He played his bluff blind. "Maybe I got confidential with the superintendent. Maybe she told me it was the food."

The Empress burst out with a sarcastic laugh. "The superintendent doesn't even know! *I* know! My scientific staff knows. But no one else. And so, Mr. Silbert—"

The Empress was speaking through clenched teeth. Her cheeks were twitching, her eyes were white-hot coals.

"And so, if you haven't gone dopey, I know exactly what's wrong. The same is true of John Dennison. If he came out of it, I know—"

Eudora rose, defiant, pleading.

"Where is John Dennison? What do you know about him? Please, Your Majesty—"

"Begging me, aren't you!" Sophia Regalope's evil laugh betrayed her sadistic pleasure.

Here, Dave realized, was her reason for making herself an Empress. She thirsted for power. She gloated to see people in agony. Not only men, but lovely women, like Eudora. Then it dawned on him that this wily Empress was seeing through his and Eudora's scheme. She was twisting it into an advantage to herself.

"Call Miss Blanchard," she snapped to one of her secretaries.

"But Miss Blanchard went with the boat to carry out your orders."

"Of course she did. Radio her instantly. Have her STOP the boat. I have two more passengers." Then, to another secretary, "Make out passages for Eudora and Mr. Silbert. They're leaving at once—to be married."

Dave saw the quick terror in Eudora's eyes. This bluff had gone far enough for her. She whispered, "No, Dave. Tell her not this boat. The next one—"

"Stay with me," he whispered.

Then he strode to the window, looked out at the *S. S. Regalope,* a half mile beyond the bay. Already the order of the Empress had reached it. It began to churn water, circling around.

The Empress snapped her fingers and the four policewomen advanced. She gave them crisp orders.

"Take charge of Eudora and Mr. Silbert while I make note of their crimes." She turned to the secretaries. "Take this official document for your files."

Two pairs of handcuffs clicked.

"What a deadly thing chivalry is," Dave thought to himself. If these officers hadn't been women, his fists might have been useful. As it was, they had him.

Poor Eudora. Handcuffs were never meant for such a gentle, beautiful girl. The sadness in her dark eyes hurt him. He had worked her into this mess.

THE four policewomen reminded Dave of four ferocious bulldogs in

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black and gold uniform. They knew how to flourish their pistols. He remembered how the sculptor's friends had looked, riddled with bullets, lying face down in the water. At his shoulder, Eudora was trembling.

"What'll she do with us, Dave?"

"She thinks she'll get rid of us by our own gag. . . . Listen."

The Empress dictated as fast as she could talk. The typewriters hummed.

" . . . to keep the record straight," she was saying, "so that no court trial will be necessary . . . I cite these many evidences of their criminally dangerous attitudes: Public insults against the statues . . . a defense of the sculptor's treason . . . an appeal to me for a passage on the pretext of an intention to marry, *but the real purpose being to try to find out about the twenty couples who have been granted safe passage.* . . ."

Eudora looked at Dave, and though she dared not speak, he knew what she was thinking. Their hoax was exploded. They had no intention of running away to marry, and the Empress knew it. They had only meant to use this ruse for an investigation.

But Dave's jaw was set with solid determination. If there was still a chance to get aboard and question someone who might know the answers, he was going to do it.

"Stay with me, Eudora," he whispered. "I'll see that *you* get out of this."

The four policewomen marched them down to the launch at the cove beyond the palace court. Pistols flourished. The epaulets of wooden beads clicked with every turn of officers' uniformed shoulders.

Dave sat close to Eudora in a side seat. The sky was darkening. The *S. S. Regalope* was a white blur, waiting across a half mile of purple waters.

At once Dave realized that Eudora was working at her handcuffs—but carefully! Was it possible that her slender hands would—

The launch, turning, struck a wave. A white spray showered over the side. At that instant, Eudora sprang up. She had a pistol in her hand.

"Don't touch your guns," she cried. I'll shoot to kill."

THE uniformed women who had sat next to her didn't have a gun. Eudora had taken it in one quick grab.

But the officer on the other side of Dave made a swift reach.

Crack! Gunfire blazed from Eudora's small hand. A tuft of black cloth jumped from the officer's shoulder, and her beaded epaulet clattered to the floor. She dropped her gun. She screamed.

"Throw your gun on the floor," Eudora snapped at the third officer. Then to the one at the wheel, "All right, you too. . . . There. Now, no false moves or you'll get it straight."

The policewoman who had just lost one epaulet began to blubber. "You don't dare shoot us. You don't dare. They'll hang you."

But the officer at the wheel told her to shut up, and everyone was silent but Dave, who muttered that a person didn't have to commit a murder to be hanged in these parts.

CHAPTER IX

The Ghost of the Sculptor

EUDORA came near to fainting from her own boldness. She made one of the officers remove Dave's handcuffs, then turned the situation over to him.

"Get on that radio," he ordered the woman at the wheel. "Get Miss Blanchard on board the ship. And no monkey business. . . . Now, tell her the

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ship isn't to wait. Those two passengers have been held back. Order of the Empress."

The launch turned toward a beach on the fartherest point of the island. Within twenty-five yards of shore, Dave ordered the officers to get out and swim ashore.

"But none of us can swim," wailed the woman with the torn shoulder.

"We can walk ashore in this water," one of the others growled. "These kids are being plenty decent to us, considering that we'll hang them sooner or later."

The four of them scrambled overboard with a splash. Dave throttled the launch for straight course through the darkness. That misty white blotch ahead was the Regalope, again moving away from land.

Eudora was close beside him. Her hand clung to his arm.

"Oh, Dave, what's going to happen to us?"

"I've nothing to worry about with *you* along, the way you handle a gun," he smiled.

"It all happened so quickly," she said. "I didn't know I was going to do it. I was trembling so that my hands just shook out of those handcuffs by themselves—and then that splash came —"

"You were wonderful."

"I was so afraid they would shoot you before I could stop them."

"Me? You were the one they'd have shot. Men are mere worms to them. But when a beautiful woman defies them—then and all they stand for—"

"We're coming up to the ship, Dave. What are we going to do?"

"Get aboard without being seen, if its humanly possible."

"But we won't have much time—not if we're going to get back to the island on our fuel supply—"

"We'll have to work fast," Dave declared. "Anything we can find out in twenty minutes is pure gold. By that time those women police will get to a telephone and the radios will start buzzing—"

"And we'll be on our way back to the island?"

"Right. We'll get there if we have to row."

"And then what?"

"We'll have to hide like a couple of earthworms until we can make contact with the Underground."

Dave's arm tightened around Eudora's slender waist. What a courageous girl she was. So unlike anyone he had ever known—so different from certain persons he had run away from. For a moment it flashed upon him that this whole desperate hoax—to make the Empress think they were planning to marry—might have been born of his own wish. . . .

WITH freakish luck they found themselves, a few minutes later, clinging to rope ladders that they had hitched to the side of the ship, peering through a porthole into a weird, green-lighted room, *looking at the ghost of the sculptor.*

"I don't believe in ghosts," Dave whispered. That sculptor is alive. Look at him, working with his clay. There's the beginning of a statue on the table—a clay mask—the image of the Empress."

"That *is* the sculptor," Eudora echoed. That's Reginald Keith. I'd know him anywhere."

"But Reginald Keith was hanged."

"We thought so."

"I saw him with my own eyes," said Dave. "He was dangling from the scaffold, and he wore a white smock just like that—"

"And a *mask!*" Eudora choked.

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They drew their heads back from the porthole and stared at each other. The dim green light showed the cold outlines of Eudora's face, fixed, like marble. The horror of this fact was dawning on her —the supreme treachery of the Empress.

Her lips trembled. "Do you realize what has happened?"

"The Empress regretted her sentence," said Dave. "She needed the sculptor. She couldn't afford to hang him."

"But she doesn't intend for the people to know she weakened—"

"So she hid him here—"

"And deliberately hanged a substitute—"

"Yes—someone about his size and build—"

"John Dennison!" Eudora's eyes closed. She was sobbing softly. "She hanged Dennison, just to pull the wool over everyone's eyes—"

Dave nodded slowly. It was a hideous thing to think about. The image of Sophia Regalope's cruel face haunted him. Was there a chance, he wondered, that she had chosen John Dennison for more reasons than one? His likeness to the sculptor—yes. But there was also his suspicions of the past two years about his son's "safe passage." And more recently, his amazing recovery from the factory curse—

A door sounded in the green-lighted room. Dave edged cautiously to the porthole, looked in, saw the sculptor standing, arms folded. The same wild, frenzied light was in his deep-set eyes that Dave had remembered from the trial. Before him stood a uniformed woman whom Dave knew to be Miss Blanchard, first secretary and chief assistant to the Empress.

MISS BLANCHARD, short, high-shouldered in her square-cut uniform, spoke in a voice that she had obviously cultivated for its masculine depth.

"I'll warn you before I spread the news to the rest of the ship, Keith. We've just had word from the Empress that two of the Underground may try to get aboard within a few minutes. They've slipped away from the island in the launch."

"Well?"

"I'll have to order the officers aboard to search every room till they're found. You'd better get your clay and chemicals and wax out of sight and lock yourself in your secret compartment."

"But they can't get in here," said the sculptor. "I'll lock the porthole and the door—"

"That makes no difference," Miss Blanchard said. "When I tell my officers to search everywhere for a couple of criminals, they search *everywhere*. They won't spare this old storeroom. They'll take this couple back for a hanging. The Empress'll see to that."

"I wish to God she'd had the nerve to hang me. If it wasn't for those London mummy crimes, I'd have killed myself long ago."

Miss Blanchard sneered. "What a set-up. You know how we'll blacken your beloved little reputation in the scientific world if you ever get rash and commit suicide on our hands."

"All right. All right. Torture me."

Miss Blanchard growled another warning, and the deadly blackmail threat was in her hard, clipped words.

"No slips, now. We can't afford to have anyone ever know you're alive—not even the officers—so, *no slips!*"

He gave a surly answer. "You've forced me to commit so many crimes, you should know I'm your trained seal."

"All right. Make it swift. I'll put officers on the lookout as soon as—Keith!" Her masculine voice barked

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like a dog. "The porthole! You know better than that. Never, never, never open it! I've told you that before. . . . No, don't *you* close it. I'll tend to it."

Breathlessly Eudora and Dave climbed down the rope ladders, waited.

Clink. The porthole was closed.

A moment later he helped Eudora into the launch. The motor chugged quietly, Dave turned the prow toward the twinkling lights of the island and plowed water.

Eudora, close at his side, murmured, "Dave, I'm scared silly. Do you mind if I faint?"

"Don't do it," said Dave. "In a couple of minutes we're going to shoot this boat into the shore rocks for a nose-on crash."

CHAPTER X

The Factory Secret

IT WAS high noon, two days later, and here came little Danny Downs, bless his loyal heart, with a lunch pail. He carried a fishpole, just for an excuse, in case any women motor cops should ask him what he was doing along this deserted bit of shore.

He looked around to make sure no one was watching. He parked his fishpole. He clambered up the shore rocks, whistling and ducked into the mouth of the cave.

"Good boy, Danny." Dave helped him over the wide break in the floor rocks. Back in the shadows they sat down and lunched together.

"Gee, you're hungrier today than you were yesterday," Danny grinned.

"I'm hungrier for all the news," said Dave. "First, is Eudora all right?"

"Sure, she's okay. She's hiding right at home. Her poor Aunt Em is almost a nervous wreck. But whenever the police come to ask any questions, Aunt Em starts telling about her operations, and they go away."

"Good, give her my love, Danny."

"Aunt Em?" said Danny with a wink.

"Eudora, you rogue." Dave bounced a pebble off the lad's tousled head. "Next, what about the launch? What are the people saying?"

"They pulled the wreckage back to the bay. The policewomen are still looking for your bodies, but they figure you're drifting to sharkland. They can't figure why you cracked into that end of the island, when there would have been so many easy places to land. The policewomen wonder if you were trying to locate an Underground meeting."

"Underground, huh?" Dave gave a low whistle. "They're closing in. We'll have to act fast or not at all. Have you been able to locate your friend, Happy?"

The boy looked up from under his eyebrows. "I've got some bad news, Dave."

"Well?"

"Happy and Jane have run away. They were on that same boat you and Endora visited. They musta got passage from the Empress and not told anyone about it. They're gone."

"Ye gods!"

Dave put his food aside. He lay on the stone floor, resting his chin in his hands, and stared out at the glittering blue sea.

"Do you think Happy'll come back, Dave?" the tousle-headed boy asked.

"We'll never see him again, Danny. Folks just don't come back from trips like that."

Danny turned his head. He looked away from Dave for several minutes, and when he rubbed his eyes with his fists he mumbled something about dust getting in his eyes. He thought he'd

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better go out to make sure his fishpole was all right.

WHEN he returned to Dave, his fighting spirit had come back.

"It's these darned girls that make all the trouble. Isn't that true, Dave?"

Dave reflected. At some time or other he had made statements of that kind. But Happy's plight was a different story.

"Let's don't feel angry toward Jane, Danny. She was a fine girl. She and Happy meant a lot to each other. But the laws of this island tend to make men and women hate each other. Do you blame them for wanting to go away?"

"I don't like women. I hate them," Danny said.

Dave patted him on the shoulder. "Maybe you'll feel different when you grow up. If you don't—well, it will be the Empress' fault. She's the one that stirs up all the hate. Are you going to let her get you under her thumb?"

Danny had never thought of it that way. "The Empress is a woman," he said, "and I don't like women. . . . But maybe some are different — like Eudora. And maybe Jane—only I wish she'd bring Happy back."

Dave knew it was unwise to kindle any fires of hope along this line. He tried to turn the subject.

"How long does it usually take the boat to make the round trip to the mainland?"

"About two weeks . . . Well, I'd better go now, Dave."

"Watch out for the police, Danny."

The boy grinned. "I'll have to. I smashed a street-light the other night."

Dave's eyes followed him unconsciously as he departed, fishpole and lunch pail in hand.

Sometimes a thought strikes through the brain like a meteor crashing to earth. It may be an old thought left hanging in the air. It may burst into consciousness with the suddenness of light.

A streetlamp smashed . . . A sunlamp shattered . . . A sunlamp over the head of John Dennison. . . .

Dave leaped to his feet, bounded to the entrance of the cave, cupped his hands to his lips, and called, "Danny! Danny! Come back! Hurry!"

The youngster dropped everything and came on the run.

"Sit down, Danny, and listen to me. Don't miss a word, because I want you to tell it all to Eudora, and have her tell the Underground."

"I'm listening," Danny said breathlessly.

"I *know* what makes the factory men dopey. I know it as sure as I'm sitting here. It's those *sunlamps*. They're not like any other sunlamps. They're something the Empress had the sculptor fix. But the superintendent herself doesn't know what they are."

WITH Danny listening in open-mouthed wonderment, Dave explained. He remembered perfectly that John Dennison's improvement had begun after the lamp had been broken. At first, he had supposed it was the blow to Dennison's head that had started the change. Later he thought it had been the food.

But it couldn't have been either. "When I fell victim to the dopey state," Dave said, "I tried the same food experiments that we thought had cured Dennison. But they had no effect on me. However, when I took over Dennison's machines where there was no violet-white sunlamp, lo and behold, the miracles began to happen. Within two weeks, Danny, all the devilish effects of those weird light rays were

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out of my system."

"Gee. Suppose we'd bust all the sunlamps in the factory?" said Danny.

Dave gave him a handshake that was man-to-man. "You're right on the beam, Danny. I'm convinced that the superintendent won't be able to replace those lights. And neither will the Empress, *until the boat comes back.*" . .

"I don't get it," Danny said, frowning.

"Take my word for it, there's someone hidden on that boat who is more of a scientist than anyone knows. I've had just a glimpse of his hideout, but from what I saw—chemicals, plastics, electronics, test tubes—I have a sure hunch that the Empress has played his genius to the limit."

"You think those sunlamps give off some sort of ray?"

Dave nodded. "I'm sure of it, Danny. The men keep absorbing it day after day. If they were to take a two weeks' vacation or go on a strike, the effects would leave them."

"Oh, boy! I'm gonna like this! Danny swung his hands through the air as if he were smashing overhead lamps. "I'm good at busting street lights. And I know a way to slip into the factory after dark."

"Take it easy, Danny. We're not going to let them make a target out of you. When the factory officials find their shop full of broken glass, they'll start shooting."

"Gee, I never thought of that."

"And if they see no chance of keeping the workers dopey they'll start locking them up."

Danny sat down, crestfallen and disappointed. "Then I don't get to bust those lamps after all?"

"I'm afraid not, Danny."

Dave considered. There were two or three members of the Underground who had the technical skill to turn the trick. If Danny could show them the way in, they could splice the sun-lamp circuit with faulty wires. By a series of tricks they might cause the factory superintendent a good two weeks of grief.

"We've got to work it so that they'll find the lamps on the blink every morning, but think they can have them back in working order the next day. As for breaking them—well, maybe, but only as a last resort."

Danny smiled. "I get it."

"Okay. Tell Eudora everything. And I'll be with her at the next Underground meeting and we'll plan our next move. You're on the beam, Danny."

CHAPTER XI

Men on the March

IT WAS a historic day that dawned a fortnight later, over Woman's Island. Pink mists hung heavy over the shores. The three thousand men who had gathered before Dave's cave were ghostly forms in the fog—three thousand bare heads and chests, three thousand pairs of brown muscular arms. Their slacks were more gray than orange until the morning sun stiffened its beams through the mist.

"I have no more to say to you until Eudora returns," Dave spoke to a handful of the leaders, "except to repeat my warning about your discipline."

"We'll hold our gang in line, don't worry," one of the leaders said. He was a trifle annoyed that a newcomer to the island should be playing the commander to these reconstructed worms.

But another of the leaders urged full cooperation. "It's up to us to take your advice, Silbert, until we get our bearings. After all, we've been in the dark for years, under the curse of those factory lamps."

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"We might have stayed under that spell all our lives," another said.

"Does your wife realize you've come out of it?"

"I've tried to keep it a secret from the moment I realized what was happening to me. I haven't talked with her. But she's been watching me suspiciously. All at once she sees that I'm taking an interest in a lot of things I'd forgotten."

Others of the group had similar tales to tell. It was a shaky house of cards —this organized secret among three thousand men. Dave knew that the rumors of changed husbands must already be flying among the women-folk of the island. Now was the time to strike, before the Empress realized that three thousand dopey slaves had changed to rebels almost overnight.

"It's lucky that boat got back on schedule," Dave said. "I'll feel a lot surer of our ground if Eudora and her three friends get the goods they're after."

"Were they actually going aboard?"

"You know the Underground. After all these killings and whippings, they'll stop at nothing. Eudora was determined to see that sculptor again in flesh and blood. If she succeeds, we'll know damned well it was John Dennison who swung from the rope."

"For my part, I'm convinced," the big, bald, brown-mustached leader said. Several others nodded. An empress who would subject them to years of mental darkness for the crime of resisting her schemes would not hesitate to take stronger measures, for any reason that suited her convenience.

Now the little motor boat chugged through the waters and beached to unload Eudora and three men. It was the same motor that had very nearly accomplished the sculptor's escape a few weeks before. The Underground had made the most of that wreckage.

Dave ran down to greet Eudora. But little Danny Downs reached the shore two bounds ahead of him.

"Did Happy come back with the boat, Eudora?" the little fellow cried.

She shook her head, patting the lad on the shoulder. "We couldn't be sure, of course. We didn't have time to see anyone. We didn't want to be seen, you know. You'd better forget about Happy and Jane."

Danny took it like a man. "Maybe they're safe in the United States."

"Maybe." Eudora looked to Dave, and he did what he could.

"Danny and I," Dave said, "and three thousand other men are all right here waiting for you to tell us what to do. We're ready to smash everything the Empress stands for."

"Good," said Eudora. "We'll start with the statues."

THE three thousand men who marched through the pink mists of that morning were not a mob. They were a well regulated army of obedient men. Their chance for life and liberty depended upon the strength of their brown muscular arms and bare backs. But it also depended upon their strength of obedience and restraint.

They marched ten abreast. Only the first twenty men were armed with axes and clubs. The others were unarmed.

"Remember," Eudora had repeated in the final words of her speech in front of the cave, just before the march began, "you will not strike at any woman."

"We will remember," the leaders had called back.

"Even when they begin to fire upon you, you won't fight. They will kill some of you, but the rest of you will go on breaking statues."

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Dave and Eudora, Happy, and several of the youth of the Underground now marched alongside the foreranks of the factory army. Dave kept saying Eudora's courageous words over to himself.

Would these men contain the stamina to go on breaking statues when death crowded in on them?

The time was at hand.

In the distance the whistles of the hall of industry blew. At this hour the factory workers were supposed to be filing through the aisles silently, taking their places at their machines. In a few minutes the whole island would know that a revolt was on.

The false gold of two statues at the south end of the boulevard caught the blaze of the morning sun. The mist had dissolved. Dave looked over the heads of the army leaders, beyond the semi-tropical foliage along the parking, toward the center of the city. The women of the island, dressed in their finery, were on their way to the palace courtyard. A bell rang out, summoning them to a meeting.

"Why is the Empress calling the people in?" the bald, brown-mustached leader asked. He halted the army around the first two statues, waited.

THEN Danny Downs, the nimble-footed, came running back from the blocks beyond with the news.

"It's a ceremony for two new statues," Danny panted.

The baldish leader turned to Eudora. "Did you see two new statues when you were aboard the ship?"

"Yes. And I saw the sculptor. He was helping unload them."

"Was it Reginald Keith?"

"I don't know," Eudora admitted. "It was still dark, and this man wore lots of whiskers, and he didn't talk. But this I do know, the statues were definitely Reginald Keith's."

"They've disguised him," said Dave. "It's exactly the thing the Empress would do. It's a case of needing a man too much to murder him."

"Did anyone have a gun on him?" the baldish leader asked.

"Miss Blanchard was over him every minute," said Eudora.

"And she's still watching over him," Danny added. "He's mounting the statues there in the courtyard, and she's after him, every step."

The big baldish leader turned to his army and shouted, "All right, men, up with your placards."

From among the ranks of three thousand brown-backed men rose a host of white cardboard placards:

THE EMPRESS CONDEMNED KEITH. BUT SHE HANGED A SUBSTITUTE. WHY? WHERE IS JOHN DENNISON? WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO HANG WITHOUT A TRIAL? WE WERE WORMS. NOW WE ARE MEN. WILL THE EMPRESS HANG US, TOO? OR SHOOT US? WE DEMAND THE SCULPTOR'S RELEASE. THE SCULPTOR IS ALIVE. SET HIM FREE. DOWN WITH THE STATUES! DOWN WITH THE GOVERNMENT!

It was upon this theme of statues that the big leader now shouted his orders to twenty obedient men. They marched forward and went to work on the two statues that stood like twin Empresses. The remaining thousands grouped themselves around this center of action. Several hundred backs were exposed to the approach of a corps of women motor cops who came sirening down the boulevard.

"Down with the statues!" Eudora cried. "Chop them down. Break them down!"

"Keep going!" the big leader

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shouted. "Pay no attention to the police . . . Slash into it, there. Give him a boost, someone, so he can reach that arm . . . Keep your placards up. Don't mind the bullets!"

The bullets came in a wave. The rat-tat-tat of submachine-guns cut a swath of death into the outer edge of the circle. Hardly anyone turned. Dave heard the thump of heads to the pavement. With a glance he saw ten or twelve fallen bodies. He heard the hideous cry of terror from one of the policewomen. She had shot her own husband.

THE bullets stopped instantly. Hundreds in the crowd turned their eyes momentarily from the swinging axes and flying chips of clay to the strange tragic scene of a dying husband clutching his uniformed wife by the shoulders, holding her at arm's length from him, calling to her in his ebbing voice.

"Why did you do it to me? Why? Why? . . . But no, *you* didn't do it. It was the *Empress. The damned Empress! She can't stand to have us be men!*"

Everyone who saw the agonied expression in that wife's face knew the realization that struck her dumb. The curse of the factory had been undone. The dying creature who held her was her *man.*

The other women police broke their way through the crowd to the base of the statue. A gold-painted clay arm fell at their feet, and a stream of red liquid oozed out of the broken end.

"Stop it! Stop it!" the officers cried. "In the name of the Empress!"

That last word must have sounded like murder to one of the ax-men. He swung with such a blow that his ax knifed straight through the clay figure's mid-section. The life-size torso, minus head and arms, came crashing down like dead stone.

Tat-tat-tat-tat. Bullets stipled the ax-man's chest, he crumpled, slid down over the tablelike pedestal of the statue, folded up on the ground like one of the statuary workers carved of clay in the base. His ax clattered down and ripped across his arm.

Dave seized the ax, leaped to the pedestal, started to swing. Then he stopped. He heard Eudora's outcry.

"Stop! It's blood!"

Then he saw. The torso that had crashed was not dead stone. Within the cast of paint and clay there was bleeding flesh.

He looked to the other statue that was being demolished. Around it the angry men had frozen, mystified. The policewomen, too, were staring with amazement. The severed head, the arms, the left shoulder that had fallen were seeping with a red liquid that was blood.

"Heaven have mercy!" one of the policewomen uttered in a quaking voice. "There's *people* inside these statues. *Live* people."

CHAPTER XII

The Sculptor Applies the Torch

WHETHER the army of three thousand liberated worms would turn into a mob of murderous men was a fair question during the swift, tense moments that followed.

"March on the Empress!" "Hang her! Shoot her!" "On to the palace!" "Grab the guns! To hell with the police!" "Find the sculptor. *He'll* account for this!"

The shouts were as wild and uncontrolled as any fighter's in the thick of battle.

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As for the leaders, all of them were crying orders, trying to whip the situation into hand.

The policewomen thought they were in authority, but the hoots that greeted any orders from them were fair warning. They gathered back into a huddle at the farther side of the street. Dave saw the desperation in their faces. If they used their guns now, it would only be to save their own hides. Their bit of shooting into the crowd might boomerang on them at any moment.

The Underground leaders shouted themselves hoarse; but it was the baldish, brown mustached factory worker who succeeded in placing the leadership where it belonged.

"Let *Eudora* tell you what to do. *She* has been in this from the start. She's one of us. *She's* the one who has worked to free us. Let *her* be your commander. She'll pit her strength against the Empress."

Eudora was helped to one of the pedestals where a statue so recently had stood. Her eyes were kindled with the fires of purpose. Her lips were almost white with anger. Yet her voice called out, strong, unquavering:

"I know what questions you're asking. We have a right to the answers. Reform your ranks. I'll lead you to the Empress. We'll demand to know what she has done."

The march held back only long enough for Eudora to appoint a few leaders for special tasks. Some of the valiant ax-men marched over to the policewomen, relieved them of their arms, and put them at work breaking into the fallen clay forms.

"Take all possible pains to identify the bodies that were in those statues," Eudora ordered. "The police should be able to tell you approximately how long they have been dead—*if* indeed they *were* dead before we crashed into them."

The policewomen, completely flabbergasted by this gruesome assignment, nevertheless went to work, breaking patches of clay off the severed and fallen heads.

DAVE and the baldish factory leader marched alongside Eudora as her bodyguards and Danny raced about, serving as a messenger whenever needed. The three thousand men followed in perfect ranks. They wanted to press the pace to double time, in their eagerness. Endora held them back.

"Slower . . . slower . . . slower," she kept calling to the front ranks, and little Danny conveyed her purpose to the leaders farther back.

As they turned off the boulevard into the palace park, their slow, measured lockstep beat upon the gravel with a heavy rhythm like drums of doom.

The assembled three or four thousand people — mostly women — turned to watch the approach of this weird spectacle. They were used to seeing these men in orange slacks behave like machines—but not such a machine as this.

Thud . . . Thud . . . Thud . . . Down the aisles they marched, filling the semicircle of park seats before the improvised platform.

"Look!" Dave whispered to Eudora. "The Empress' husband. Somebody's let him down from the dome—"

"So he can tell something to his wife!" Eudora said. "There's a swift conference going on up there on the stage."

It was apparent only to those onlookers who were not momentarily overwhelmed by the approaching army of men. The sharper eyes that watched the Empress for her reaction in this mo-

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ment were rewarded by a telling scene. Her husband, the low worm that she so despised was bringing her some news —something he had observed from his observation tower.

The Empress bent an ear to him, then she looked quickly down the boulevard, as if trying to check up on his information.

"He's told her that we smashed a couple statues," Dave whispered as they marched down closer. "Look, she's in a bit of a panic."

"Why shouldn't she be?" Eudora raised her eyebrows with righteous anger.

"Yeah. You can ask her that one."

The wormish husband must have given her the advance information; for a moment later, when policewomen hurried up to the stage from the boulevard, she took their news with an annoyed wave of the hand. She already knew. She was already taking action.

For a moment she turned to the crowd, now gathering with a storm of curiosity.

"Our dedication of two new statues has been momentarily interrupted," she called through the loud speakers. "We will continue as soon as these late-comers have seated themselves."

Her swift strategy! Pretending that these factory workers had been sent for, to attend this statue dedication. Once before, when Dave and Eudora had carried their bluff into her camp, she had turned the tables by granting them what they seemed to want, in order to regain the initiative.

Would she achieve that with these angry men? Dave almost wished their mob spirit had been encouraged. Obediently they were taking their places in the audience. Yet among them were weapons. They held tightly to their clubs, axes, guns. And no policewoman, seeing their fighting faces, advanced to challenge them. Their power was their presence.

"Stay with me," Eudora whispered to Dave—the same words he had said to her on a previous night that they had stormed the regal fortress.

SHE led the way right to the platform. Her steady eyes tightened their grip upon the Empress, who was now in something of a flurry to whisper some orders to her assistants before facing Eudora.

But under the stress of six thousand pairs of eyes, the Empress felt compelled to toss another flying apology to her audience to assure them everything was under control.

"Ladies and gentlemen, our new sculptor—" she gestured toward the slender, slightly stooped, bewhiskered man standing beside the two veiled monuments—"comes to us most highly recommended. He is perhaps the only person to be found in the United States who can duplicate the high quality of work done by the late Reginald Keith. He has come to us—"

Here the Empress stopped. The presence of Eudora, standing within five feet of her, arms folded, was too much. She glanced toward the women police at the rear of the stage. For some reason they were too nearly paralyzed to move. Perhaps it was the fact that Dave, the baldish factory worker, and four other persons who had the look of angry men, not slaves, were also standing there on the edge of the stage, their arms folded.

The Empress started again. "As I was saying, he has come to us—"

Eudora's clear voice cut in over the microphone. "Does he know what happened to Reginald Keith?"

"Your intrusion is out of order." The Empress was white with rage, if not fear. Dave knew *she* knew what was

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coming. Yes, the awful news of that statue had reached her. "Your intrusion—"

"How do we know," Eudora cut in again, "that this whiskered gentleman isn't Reginald Keith?"

"That's absurd. Keith was hanged."

Eudora turned her keen glare on the bewhiskered sculptor. "Does that disturb you in the least, sir, to know that the former sculptor was hanged? You seem very calm over the news. Maybe you doubt whether the right man got the rope."

A low murmur passed through the audience. It was the Empress, not the sculptor, who started visibly at these words.

Then the Empress gave a swift gesture with her right hand (at the same time covering the wart on her nose with the left).

"State your business, Eudora, and be quick about it."

"I represent the three thousand men who just walked in."

"What do they want?"

"They don't like your government. They don't like any symbols of it—your uniforms, your polished domes, your cheap gold police wagons, or your statues. The more those statues look like you the less they like them. So they have organized to destroy them—"

THE Empress leaped at this suggestion. "So you want the statues destroyed. Very well, I'll grant your request at once!"

"But wait!" Eudora cried. "We *have* destroyed two, and we've *discovered*—"

"I'll have them all destroyed at once!" The Empress screamed the words, so that anything more that Eudora might have said was lost.

And with the sudden shift of strategy, Dave felt himself sinking. In a twinkling the Empress had seen a way to turn this situation to her own advantage. She motioned to the secretary, Miss Blanchard, and before Eudora could get a voice of protest into the microphone, Miss Blanchard and the bewhiskered sculptor hurried off the rear of the stage *to destroy the statues*.

The audience watched the official gold and black car whirl through the driveway, they saw the flaming torch that the sculptor held out of the car window. The car drove up to the first statue; the sculptor touched the torch to the gold paint.

A stream of red flame flowed up the side of the gold-coated figure. In a moment the whole statue was itself a torch, flaming red against the white forenoon sky.

Then another statue was ignited, to become a monument of fire. Another . . . and another . . . and then another. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

The Empress Defends Herself

WHAT had been an audience became a disorganized scattering of people, awe-struck by the spectacle of their familiar art objects going up in smoke. And yet, while many small throngs edged their way outward from the courtyard meeting place, a great number, particularly those factory workers with their half-concealed placards, remained in their seats.

It was Dave's impulse to rout out a bunch of these men and run for fire-wagons. He had felt certain, the moment those first two statues had been revealed as containing human beings, that any number of the forty life-size gold figures might also be found to be human beings with a coat of clay and paint.

This theory assumed the highest

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probability, now that the Empress had suddenly decided that the statues should be destroyed.

But Dave's proposed action was cut short by a message delivered by Danny Downs. The little fellow had been quick to race out after the sculptor and that female watchdog, Miss Blanchard. The sculptor must have had his note ready, in anticipation of such a need to communicate.

Danny came running back to the stage, and with the pretense of simply skipping across the path at the side of it, he flipped the note into Dave's hands.

Dave glanced at it, passed it on to Eudora. It read: "Let the fires burn. —R. Keith."

That was all. But it was enough to hold Dave to the spot, to take things as they came. Which was, in this case, the hardest thing in the world to do. For although he couldn't see how a dead statue, standing through months and years, could possibly hold a *live* body, he was tantalized, now, by the conviction that any one of these statues *might*. All of them might, in fact. There was something about that number *forty*.

Those of the audience who had held their places, only to gaze up and down the boulevard for what they could see from their present vantage point, now began to bear down with their angry glares upon the Empress again.

Men with weapons gathered closer. Enough men crowded onto the stage that the Empress began to feel a fence tightening around her. Some of the women police were caught in it too. But not her husband. He slipped away unobstrusively and returned to his domed tower overhead. From there he could look down on all the proceedings. There he felt safe.

"While your statues are burning, Sophia Regalope," said Eudora calmly, "we may as well come to an understanding."

The crowd grew attentive as her firm words sounded through the speakers.

"We shall no longer address you as Her Majesty," said Eudora. "Your reign has come to an end."

Men cheered. Some women started to cheer. They looked at each other, embarrassed, uncertain whether they dared reveal any inner feelings. But some of them had already sought out their husbands or sweethearts among these reconstructed men, to stand proudly beside them.

"A new government is taking over," Eudora continued. "Its' first official act will be to try you for murder."

"Murder!" the Empress shrieked. "Murder! — me? Why, this is outrageous. It's a frame."

"We'll proceed as soon as the sculptor returns from carrying out your orders. . . . Oh, yes, here we have a little news of interest to you, Sophia, and to all of you."

THE crowd waited quietly while Eudora unfolded the note that had been handed to her by one of the axmen.

"A strange fact came to light a few minutes ago when we thoughtlessly destroyed two statues. We found they contained human bodies. And now, according to this note, a number of policewomen and factory workers have agreed upon the identity of those two bodies which we unwittingly slashed into pieces. *They were the son of John Dennison, and that son's bride.*"

It might have been thunder rolling up from the audience. From the terror in the Empress' face, she might have pictured those angry men walking onto the stage and seizing her. But when she spoke, it was with the same lying

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voice and mocking manner that seemed to say, "I should have hanged these men—but there'll be another chance. I'll turn this trick as I've turned others. I'll play the sculptor again to my advantage—"

But all she did say was, "Impossible! Impossible!"

"Would you like to have the heads of these two dead persons brought before your eyes?"

"This is outrageous!"

"You are convinced, then?"

"Mistakes can happen!"

"Mistakes!" Eudora mocked. She looked to Dave, to the Underground leaders around her, to the breathless audience. The last of the strays who had been enticed away by the sight of the fires were now back, taking in every word from the amplifiers, every interplay of expression their ears and eyes could catch. And many of these echoed, with a groan, "Mistakes!"

The Empress quickened her talk, trying to drown out these ugly echoes. "That sculptor must have done something dreadful. That's too bad. Young Dennison and his bride. I had meant to get across safely. The sculptor must have taken some diabolical notion of his own when they were on the ship. That was two years ago—"

"You remember everything perfectly, don't you?" said Eudora.

The Empress sighed and tried to be casual. "Fortunately, neither of them have any living relatives."

"Ah! Do you hear that, ladies and gentlemen?" Eudora called out. "The Empress somehow knows that John Dennison is not living."

At this a host of half concealed placards came up. All over the audience were the accusing questions:

WHERE IS JOHN DENNISON?

SHE HANGED A SUBSTITUTE. WHY?

AT THIS juncture the slender slightly stooped, much bewhiskered sculptor returned to the stage from the official car. He tossed his burning torch to the two new statues, not yet unveiled. The white cloth blazed up in a column of yellow fire; then the gold paint caught, and huge blazes of red cast a weird light upon the faces on the stage.

Before Reginald Keith removed his false whiskers he threw words of defiance at Miss Blanchard, daring her, under the circumstances, to shoot him for revealing himself.

The Empress made a rush toward her secretary, then. But three men caught her just as she reached for Miss Blanchard's gun. Her chance to shoot Reginald Keith, to pin all crimes on a dead man, was gone.

She recoiled from the touch of her captors, the beaded epaulets at her shoulders rattled violently as she twisted. Finally she quieted, and they released her left hand so that she could have the comfort of covering the wart on the right side of her nose.

Her hawk-like face took on a snarling expression, as if she were not quite convinced that men, nature's lowest of creatures, were equal to what they had undertaken.

"They're moving!" came a squawking masculine voice from high overhead. Sophia Regalope's husband, at his regular perch on the palace tower, was bending over the rail, shouting down with all his voice. "They're moving. *The statues! They're nodding their heads. They're waving their hands!*"

If poor old John Dennison had pushed aside his headstone (which bore the name of Reginald Keith) and had walked calmly out of his grave, Dave and a few thousand other spectators could not have been more astonished. The sight was too weird to be imagined.

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A few women fainted. Men with weapons stirred as if with the fear that they were about to be attacked by supernatural agents.

Up and down the boulevards thirty-eight life-sized figures, blackened to an earthly color by their recent fires, were coming to life. Fingers moved slowly—and bits of clay and wax fell from their fingertips. Chunks of clay and the strange waxy-icy material within the clay broke from the legs and hips and fell over the edges of the pedestals.

Knees bent, shoulders straightened, arms began waving slowly. Palms of crusty clay hands beat together until white flesh showed. Then the palms brushed at the face until masks fell off and human features showed. Eyes opened, and mouths, too, in very life-like yawns.

Down from their pedestals stepped one live figure after another. Half rotted clothing still clung to some of them. As they gradually awakened from their sleep they were scarcely aware that they were half naked or that they were being watched by thousands of pairs of wide, unbelieving eyes.

And yet these spectators recognized them, as they came forth, one by one—no, two by two—for invariably the awakening man's first words were a call for his mate.

"The newly married couples!" Dave muttered, as he watched this incredible scene. "All those twenty couples who *didn't* get their safe passage—all except the Dennisons that we innocently killed!"

IN THE midst of the strange picture of rejoining of couples and rejoicing for the return of life, a great many people caught the hysterical wail of the Empress, no longer able to control her words.

"Reginald Keith, you damned cheat! You were ordered to kill them and mold your clay on their corpses! How did you dare—"

"Shut up!" Miss Blanchard snapped.

The Empress felt the savage bark of her secretary, and tried to hold a civil tongue. But Dave knew she was past finding any tricks to cover her words.

The sculptor must have felt a great burden drop from his shoulders. He was smiling, talkative, eager to tell how the blackmail threat had played him into treacherous hands.

"But I saw my chance in these two inventions," he said, straightening his stooped shoulders. "I made the sun-lamps in a way that would enable the men to recover, once they could break away from the deadly effects of the ray. I knew that sooner or later someone would discover this little secret. But you didn't count on that, did you Empress?"

Sophia Regalope growled under her breath, "I'm not your Empress. When I establish my new Empire, there won't be any men. I'll get a woman scientist the next time. Men? I'll turn them into beasts—"

But no one was listening to her mutterings. Everyone was too much interested in what this mysterious sculptor was at last saying. They brought him closer to the microphone.

"Before I fell under the spell of this island," he went on, "I had developed my first 'liquid-air wax' and used it successfully in preserving animals. It isn't harmful to the tissues to be engulfed instantly in this potent freezing mixture, and I was able to perfect a thin coating to cover it, to hold the enclosed body at a temperature many degrees below zero—so many that nothing less than a good fire could break the refrigerator shell. So, with this series of inventions, I contrived to turn the Empress' victims into living ghosts that

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would someday come back to haunt her."

Two new voices came to the microphone at this juncture—Jane's and Happy's—and a third, that of little Danny Downs.

"Would you mind explaining that again for Jane's and my benefit?" Happy laughed.

"You see," said Jane, "we just now broke out of those piles of clay—" she pointed to where the two new statues beside the platform had been burning, "and we still don't know what's happened to us!"

"Gee, you're back again!" little Danny squealed. "Look, Dave, I told you Happy would come back to me. Gee, I guess I'm even glad to see Jane, too, even if she is a woman."

THE crowd was cheering, and most of the factory workers tore their bitter placards into confetti to toss into the air.

But there was still a detail of reestablishing some sort of working government, to handle certain truculent prisoners and establish a temporary police force, and handle the affairs of the island until a permanent plan could be drawn up.

"But not a woman's government!" some man from the audience shouted.

"Not a man's government!" his wife rejoined.

To which the sculptor-scientist smiled, saying that he believed the happiest solution would be a cooperative arrangement between the sexes. He said, "We have here an alert young couple who have the judgment and courage to put us on our feet."

His gesture toward Eudora and Dave brought a solid acclaim from the population assembled.

Dave caught Eudora's smile. He felt the glow of the sure friendship that was between them. Only it was more than that; it was love and understanding. He had known it for a long time, and she must have, too.

They exchanged a brief, whispered consultation, then David went to the microphone.

"Ladies and gentlemen, if you approve of the decision which Eudora and I have reached regarding the Empress, we will accept the honor of being your leaders, at least until a permanent government can be drawn up."

Over the cheers came the cry of revenge against the Empress. "Hang her!" "Shoot her!" "Burn her at the stake!"

"Before we announce our decision," said Dave, "we shall grant her the privilege she refused the sculptor when he was on trial." He turned to the furious Empress. "Have you anything to say for yourself, in the face of what has been revealed against you?"

The Empress snarled like a hedgehog in a trap. "You can't pin murder on me. I didn't murder these couples. No harm ever came to them. You can see that for yourself. They could have lived on inside those statues for years."

Dave nodded and he and Eudora again whispered. Then Eudora came to the microphone.

"It is our decision that you will receive the same harmless treatment that your murder victims were lucky enough to get. Today you'll be cast in Keith's liquid-air wax and preserved in a statue."

The Empress gave forth with a spine chilling wail. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" Then she suddenly changed to her hedgehog snarl. "How long will you keep me there?"

Eudora glanced up at the gold dome overhead. She caught Dave's wink and nod. There was perfect understanding in that unspoken conversation.

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"We'll keep you there," said Eudora, "until your husband requests that we bring you back."

From the dome overhead came the squawking little voice of Woman's Island's lowest worm, sounding very much like a happy banty rooster.

"'Bye, Sophia. You're going to be gone a long time."

THE END

FANTASTIC FACTS ABOUT THE BEE

WHEN a bee stings, it is harmed more than its victim. In the act, the bee's life is lost. The whole end of the insect's abdomen is torn away when it attempts to withdraw the barbed spear.

* * *

There are no red corpuscles in the life stream of the bee. Its blood is a colorless fluid.

* * *

The bee's brain is not the master of the nervous system of his whole body. If his head is removed, the rest of the bee can stand up and walk! If the entire abdomen is cut away in an accident, the front part of the insect can still take food!

* * *

The honeybee beats its wings 190 times a second while in flight. Unlike the bird, the wing of the bee describes a figure eight in the air. This motion was first observed in 1869 by the French experimenter, E. J. Marey. After attaching bits of gold leaf to the tips of the insects wings, he was able to watch the glinting patter the wings produced when the insect was held in a beam of light.

* * *

In order to create one pound of honey, it is necessary for the bees to compile a combined flight mileage of approximately 50,000 miles—practically two trips around the globe!

* * *

The drone bee has a grandfather but no father. Hatching from an unfertilized egg, the drone has only one parent, the queen. But the queen came from a fertilized egg and had both a father and mother. Thus the fatherless drone has a grandfather.

* * *

At the height of the laying period, a queen will deposit from four to six eggs a minute. Sometimes a queen bee will lay more than her own weight in eggs during a single day. She is capable of producing 5,000 a day, although the peak is usually between 1,500 and 2,000.

* * *

When the temperature falls below 50 degrees F. the wing muscles of the bee become paralyzed. At 45 degrees F. he is unable to move his legs.

* * *

A species of stingless bee, which lives in the interior of Australia, employs an insect version of the medieval rack to deal with foes seeking an entrance to the nest. As the invader alights at the doorway, guard-bees rush upon it, grab different legs, and pull with all their might in opposite directions. Stretched out to the limit, the captive struggles until it grows weak and finally dies. Bees of this species have been known to tug in this manner for fully an hour before they released their grip.

* * *

The bee has a significant place in the sacred books of many lands. It is discussed in the "Rig-Veda" written in Sanskrit between the years 2000 and 3000 B.C. as well as the "Book of the Mormon," first printed in 1830. The Hebrew writers of the Bible mention the bee and its work. The Koran contains an entire chapter on the tiny insect. According to the teachings of Mohammed, the bee is the only creature ever directly spoken to by the Lord.

* * *

Man's attempt to find a cure for gray hair is almost as old as history itself. The ancient Assyrians thought they had the true answer. Bees were roasted in oil and smeared on the hair.

* * *

Mead, the honey drink of ancient Europe, was produced by the fermentation of a mixture of honey and water. The term "honeymoon" is thought to date from the days of the mead drinkers. An old Teuton custom was to drink mead for thirty days after a wedding.

* * *

In the sixth century B. C., the Greek philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras, preached the life-giving properties of honey. His followers believed that if they ate honey for breakfast each day they would be free from disease throughout their lives.

* * *

Throughout his life, Napoleon was fascinated by bees. They were chosen as the chief motif for his coat of arms. When he was crowned emperor, he wore a green coronation robe decorated with tiny bees.

* * *

Honey was believed to have preservative properties. The Greeks sometimes used honey to preserve the body of the deceased. It is said that Democritus, the philosopher, and Alexander the Great were buried in honey. The effectiveness of the use of honey for this purpose is indicated by the fact that preparations for the state funerals of potentates in India sometimes require a full year, during which time the body is kept in honey.

* * *

The bee's world is a world of perfumes and odors, of objects seen in ultraviolet light as well as in rays visible to our eyes; but a world in which greens and reds appear as gray.

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ROMANCE of the ELEMENTS

ONE DAY IN 1791 — THE REVEREND WILLIAM GREGOR, STROLLING THROUGH CORNWALL'S MENACHAN VALLEY, NOTICED SOME BLACK SAND THAT LOOKED LIKE GUN POWDER. INTERESTED, HE ANALYSED A SAMPLE WHICH HE CONCLUDED CONTAINED IRON OXIDE AND A BRAND NEW ELEMENT.

GREGOR CALLED HIS ELEMENT "MENACHINE", BUT THREE YEARS LATER M. KLAPROTH CHOSE "TITANIUM" AS THE NAME OF A SIMILAR SUBSTANCE HE DETECTED BY BREAKING DOWN RED SKORL. KLAPROTH'S NAME STUCK; GREGOR'S WAS FORGOTTEN.

IT TOOK A "BOMB" TO JAR TITANIUM LOOSE! IN 1910, M.A. HUNTER GOT THE ELEMENT, NEARLY PURE, BY HEATING SODIUM WITH THE TETRACHLORIDE IN AN AIR-TIGHT STEEL BOMBLIKE CYLINDER, SECURELY BRACED.

WHITE PAINT PIGMENT CONTAINING TITANIC OXIDE RESISTS AIRBORNE IMPURITIES. A LITTLE FERRO-TITANIUM HELPS MAKE STEEL RAILS STRONGER. AS EARLY AS 1908, CAST IRON CAR WHEELS WERE TREATED WITH TITANIUM COMPOUND. FOR YEARS THEY'VE BEEN USING TITANIUM IN ARTIFICIAL TEETH!

IF YOU COULD GATHER IN ONE HEAP ALL THE TITANIUM IN THE WORLD, IT WOULD OVERSHADOW THE PILES MADE BY ALL THE COPPER, SULPHUR, PHOSPHEROUS, LEAD OR CARBON. BUT GATHERING IT'S THE TRICK, FOR TITANIUM IS THINLY SPREAD ALL OVER THE GLOBE.

TITANIUM is number 22 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Ti. Its atomic weight is 48.1; its specific gravity 4.5; melting point (according to Hunter) 1850°. Pure titanium is silver-white, with a fracture similar to that of steel. It is hard and brittle when cold, but at a low red heat is malleable and can be forged readily like iron. It is of little use commercially, except in making steels and bronzes, and in making artificial teeth.

(Next issue: The Romance of Tungsten)

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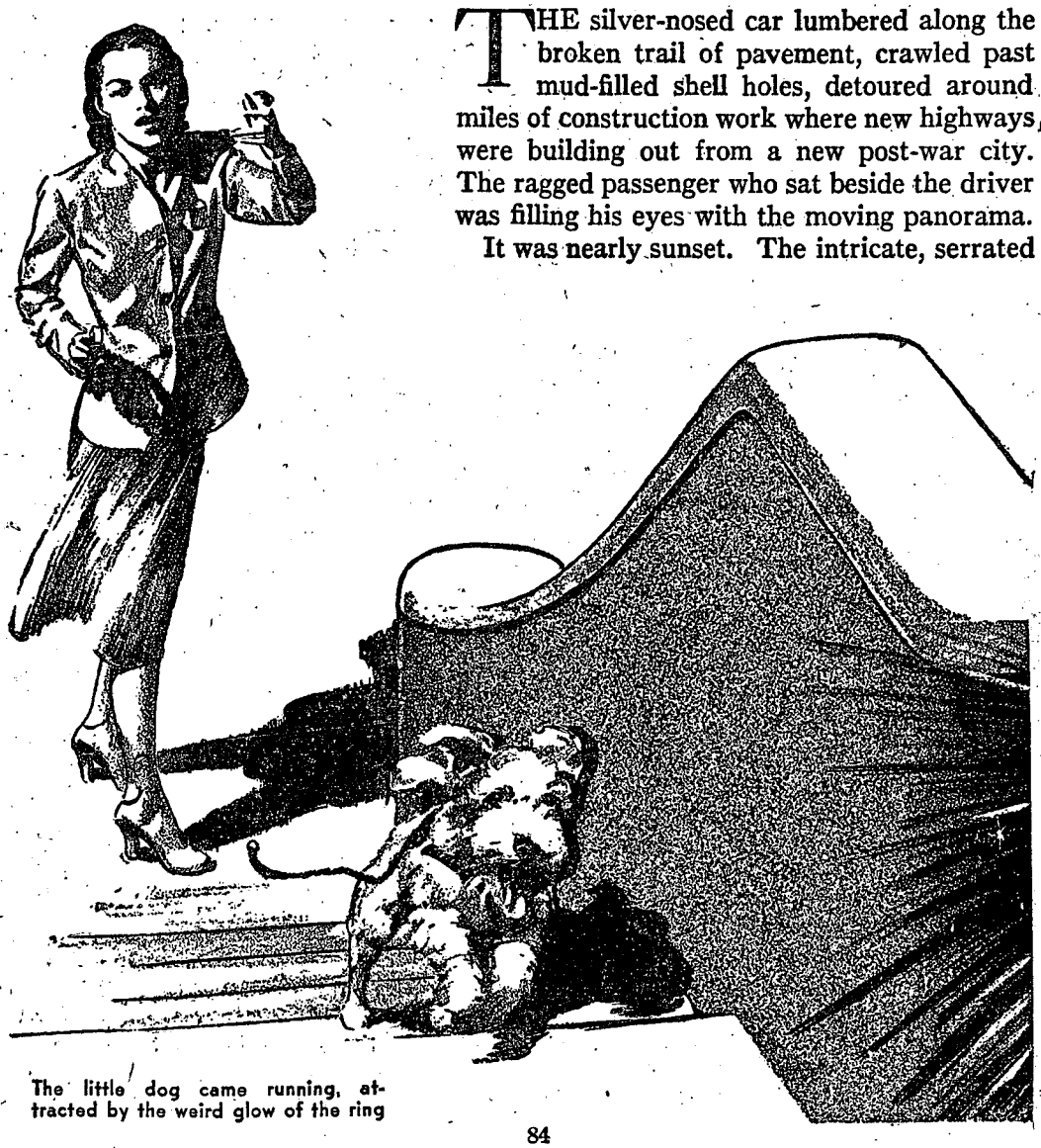
the Sapphire

By CLEO ELDON

What was the meaning of the glow from this ring that only a few could see?

THE silver-nosed car lumbered along the broken trail of pavement, crawled past mud-filled shell holes, detoured around miles of construction work where new highways were building out from a new post-war city. The ragged passenger who sat beside the driver was filling his eyes with the moving panorama.

It was nearly sunset. The intricate, serrated



The little dog came running, attracted by the weird glow of the ring

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skyline, twenty miles to the northeast, was becoming impressive. Bright new buildings with sturdy domes and graceful towers—these were symbols of hope in this new post-war age.

"That's as far as I'll take you," said the flashily dressed young man at the wheel. "That's my destination. The city's expecting me. You see that big copperish dome near the center? That's the government building."

"It looks important," the ragged passenger commented.

"That's the dome I'll have over my head."

The ragged passenger, who had given his name as "Lanky" Louis, gave a low sigh. He was glad the ride was nearly over. He glanced at his tattered shoes and dusty trousers, wondered whether the young man at the wheel would deign to take him through the gates into the city. Stragglers-without-a-country were far too numerous on this war-ripped continent. Cities were over-burdened with them.

The horizon dimmed to purple. The lavender and yellow lights from the city grew steadily brighter, until the earth and sky became a mass of blackness around them.

Now skimming over a stretch of wide new pavement, the silver-nosed car caught the gleam of amber floodlights. An immense roadside sign flashed its warning that every vehicle must stop for inspection. Ahead, the way was blocked by a massive steel gate.

The motor idled silently while the handsome young driver snapped his answers to the questions of the guards. They glanced at his papers.

"Then you are Milton Molander, a new Counsellor?"

"Right. Appointed by the National Manager. And I don't like being delayed by formalities."

Four of the six chromium-helmeted guards gazed at him with what passed for respect, and one of them bowed and said, "We are honored."

But the two guards on Lanky's side of the car exchanged sly looks, and one muttered, "Another Counsellor. The city is running over with Counsellors."

Milton Molander didn't hear. He was being questioned further. Had he no entourage? Was this one passenger his only bodyguard? A Counsellor should know that travelling is dangerous in these times.

"I know," said Molander "But these bands of cutthroats are nothing to me. I can outwit them. Or outfight them. I had an encounter just this afternoon. That's how I happened to pick up this rapscallion you call my bodyguard. I saved his life."

"I thought it was I who saved yours," said Lanky Louis. With steady eyes he gauged the effect of his words on the haughty young Counsellor. What he got was a chilling laugh.

"The beggar's got a perverted sense of humor," said Milton Molander. "Any more questions?"

ONE of the big steel panels of the gate swung up like the blade of a mammoth guillotine. The car eased through.

The boulevard led them to the bright lights in the center of the city. A circle of theaters, shops, and restaurants enclosed the government plaza.

"Beautiful," said Lanky. He gazed at the stately facades of government buildings grouped in the plaza. Over the largest temple-like structure, the massive copper dome dominated the scene. Floodlights fountained up against its curved surface.

"Beautiful," said Molander. He was looking at a girl.

The passing street crowds were looking at the girl too. And no wonder. The

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elevated glass porch of one of the minor government buildings was as brilliantly lighted as any stage. The stage was all hers. She was standing at an easel, painting quite unaware of the passing throngs.

"Beautiful," Lanky repeated. Then, returning his gaze to the lofty architecture, he added. "All decked out in flags."

"Huh?" said Molander. "You mean a red dress with diamonds." He glanced back to make sure.

They cruised on and Lanky chuckled. Then Molander saw the circle of flags around the dome. "Oh—er—flags. Yes, fifteen of them," he said. "One for each Counsellor. Next week there'll be sixteen."

"When I see the sixteenth," said Lanky, "I'll know it stands for you."

"Right."

"And I'll remember that it would have hung at half mast if I hadn't saved your life today."

Molander hesitated, avoiding Lanky's eye. "Well, don't be blowing about it. . . . This is your reward, my bringing you here. . . . Those guards wouldn't have let you through the gate." Then, with an icy thrust, "There's too many of your breed infesting the streets of our cities. Something's going to be done."

Lanky studied the face of the Counsellor. It was interesting that so young a man had risen to a position of such importance. This hardness, this cruelty that shone cold in his eyes, betrayed his quickness to take advantage of friend or foe. Lanky shrugged.

"There were two flag poles at the top of the dome. What do they stand for?"

"The tall one," said Molander tersely, "is the national manager. The other, his secretary."

"Secretary?"

"I suppose you never heard of Secretary Van Voorhees."

"Was his picture in the papers?"

"As if you tramps ever read the papers," Molander taunted. "But even if you did you'd never see him. Why should he seek publicity? He gets his job by appointment. He's a governmental expert. But he's a strange guy. He keeps out of the limelight. We local Counsellors will see him and the National Manager sometime next month."

LANKY shrugged again. There was the slight matter of food that the young Counsellor seemed to have overlooked. After all, a square meal as well as a ride to the city had been promised Lanky—hardly an excessive reward for his coming to the rescue with his dagger.

Lanky drew the dagger, now, and pretended to polish it on his ragged sleeve, thinking to remind the young Counsellor of his promise.

"Put that thing away. It makes me nervous," said Molander.

"I wouldn't have used it this afternoon if you hadn't been desperate," Lanky said quietly. "Even then I was careful not to kill any of those bloody bandits—"

"*I'd* have killed them," Molander growled.

"I'm surprised. Some men would have talked their way past them. And you—a Counsellor—"

But somehow Lanky was half convinced. This young man's cruel talk and rash actions went together.

"Here we around the plaza again." Molander throttled down to a snail's pace. The white light from the wide glass porch, brought his coldly handsome features into sharp relief again. "Will you put that dagger away?"

"A thousand pardons," said Lanky. "Careless of me to forget." He slipped the short blade through his belt and adjusted his tattered black sash to con-

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ceal it. "We're stopping? I don't see any restaurants here. You mentioned a dinner."

"Go find it for yourself," said Molander. "It's high time I got rid of you and started meeting the right people."

Molander was again gazing over the heads of the sidewalk crowds toward the wide glassed-in porch where the girl was painting. He stopped the car.

"Thank you for the ride," said Lanky Louis quietly. He stepped to the curb, feeling acutely conscious of his sad rags. "Good luck, your honor."

But the young Counsellor didn't answer. He was too busy gazing. Lanky gave a painful shrug and shuffled off. But halfway across the plaza he glanced back at the group of government buildings, particularly the smaller pinkish temple with the glass porch and the lovely girl in the red dress.

"Beautiful," he murmured.

CHAPTER II

Underworld Handouts

THE OLD MAN was a straggler-without-a-country, the same as all of Lanky's new companions who loitered here in the deep shade of the park trees.

But the Old Man seemed to be one of the cleaner of the underworld population. At least he kept his long fluffy beard as white as snow. Lanky watched him, that day they met, and learned many things from him in the week that followed.

"Just because a man wears rags doesn't mean he's unhappy," said the Old Man. "I'm happy because I'm at peace with the world. I've been happy ever since the war ended."

Lanky followed him along the gravel paths through miles of grassy parks. At such a slow hobbling pace it was surprising how much ground the Old Man covered.

"It isn't how fast you walk," said the old man, "so much as how much you keep walking. We'll go down to the river at the edge of the city. It's a good place to bathe and wash our clothes. As long as there's a river, every tramp and beggar has a right to keep clean."

"What do you do in the winter-time?"

"Break the ice while it's still thin. When it gets too thick you wait for spring."

"I think I'll get a job before next winter," said Lanky thoughtfully.

"You should. You have your health and your youth. If you would get your shaggy locks trimmed you could almost look like a gentleman. How old are you?"

"About thirty-five," said Lanky.

"You're thin. But if you get a job and put yourself on full-feed you'd fat up. Some tramps can't look like anything else. But you've got good eyes and a good forehead. Can you read and write?"

"Yes. I used to read everything—before the war."

"The war," the old Man echoed. "That's what they all say. Up and down the parks and along the curbstones it's still the war. As if every straggler got so shaken up he'll never take root again. Some of them *can't*. Others just don't want to."

"Does it make any difference?"

The Old Man reached as if to shake Lanky by the shoulders, but his frail old arms lacked the energy to carry through. "Of course it makes a difference. Not a sparrow falls without making a difference . . . Are you going with me again tonight to the plaza?"

"Oh, yes!"

The eagerness in Lanky's voice made the Old Man twinkle.

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"*That* makes a difference, I can see. And no wonder. She is not only beautiful to the eyes. She is beautiful in spirit. I believe she would never harm a living creature."

"How long have you known her?"

"About a year. Soon after William Lusk was established in the Pink Temple to prepare feasts for the Counsellors, he and his wife brought her to be their hostess."

"I saw her the evening I arrived."

"Through the glass walls of the porch? Did you realize you were looking through *one-way glass?* She doesn't see the street crowds that throng past the Pink Temple except when she passes the oval windows. She is said to be somewhat shy."

"Shyness, then, is a part of her beauty," said Lanky. "But I can't imagine a shy girl getting along as a hostess to sixteen Counsellors."

"She is a mystery to them—a very attractive mystery . . . Can you imagine her playing hostess to a bunch of tramps and stragglers like us?"

"Hardly!"

"Then you have a surprise in store for this very night."

THE night's gayety was in full sway around the brightly lighted plaza district. Lanky felt the disapproving eyes of passers-by. His rags must have offended them.

"This way, Lanky," said the Old man. "Don't you see the policemen across the way? It's best to keep in the shadows?"

Shadows were the shabby man's friends. Bright lights and policemen and the gay throngs on dress parade—these were to be avoided.

But man's gregarious instincts are strong. The tramps and vagrants were drawn toward the vortex of this whirl of life the same as the noble and the well-to-do.

"The Counsellors are still dining," the Old man observed. "We'll have to wait until they are through before the beautiful Janette will serve us."

Lanky gazed in fascination at the glassed-in porch of the Pink Temple.

Yes, young Milton Molander was there, seated among the other Counsellors. The eastern side of the circular porch was connected by wide marble stairs to the main government building. The officials who worked beneath the great copper dome had only to cross this glass-roofed esplanade to dine in conspicuous luxury.

"They love to be watched," said the Old Man. "Not all people of great wealth or power like to be watched, perhaps. But these fifteen Counsellors are show-offs. They want people to know that they have the best of food and the best of service and the most beautiful of hostesses."

"There are sixteen Counsellors," said Lanky.

"I don't know about the new one—whether he will be a show-off like the others. I haven't observed him."

"Then look to the table on the left," said Lanky. "That rather tall, handsome fellow in the tan suit is Molander. I've observed him from the day I arrived. Let's don't go too close. I don't think he'll want to see me."

"Remember we are looking through one-way glass. They are spared the *pain* of looking at the thousands of ordinary citizens who parade past their temple. But they have the satisfaction of knowing *they're* being watched and talked about—*and envied.*

Lanky murmured his amusement. "They'd better remind Molander he's being watched."

At the moment the new Counsellor was making himself rather too conspicuous. He was clinging to the hand

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of the beautiful hostess, trying to get her to sit down with him. She refused politely and started away. He called at her angrily.

By this time the street crowds were stopping to watch, and point, and laugh. Young Molander, oblivious to this, demonstrated a bit of bad temper. To the crowd he looked like a spoiled child threatening a playmate with dire consequences if she didn't play his way.

She countered with an amused smile and must have reminded him that he was being watched. For he suddenly turned to the nearest oval window and glanced out. A streetful of people laughed. They couldn't help it.

He turned, beet-red, and stormed off toward the esplanade and out of sight.

The Old Man shook his head. "He might have laughed with them. The joke was on him."

"He's not a man to take a joke on himself," said Lanky. "He's not only humorless. He's rash and headstrong —and I suspect he's a bit treacherous."

JUST an hour later Lanky himself was holding the hand of the beautiful Janette. And she was not trying to walk away from him. She was looking into his eyes, talking with him in her kindly, sympathetic way.

The Old Man and four or five hundred other denizens of the city's underprivileged world, had taken their plates of food and gone on. Lanky was the last man in the breadline.

"You haven't been here before," Janette had said, handing him a paper tray of steaming food.

"I just came to the city recently." How strange, he thought, that the same beautiful girl who served the Counsellors should be found managing a breadline for the city's social outcasts.

This street was a part of the lower level of the plaza. Trucks rumbled through the dimly lighted catacombs. The concrete walls and ceilings vibrated from the unseen plaza traffic somewhere overhead. Down here it was a different world—a world full of deeper shadows and dank smells, where hungry men could hide, and steal, and fight, and sleep—free from the disapproving eyes of the polite people overhead.

But these long wooden tables where Janette and her helpers handed out free food to hungry men belonged, Lanky had been told, to the same Pink Temple with the circular glass porch. This was the service entrance. Within this domain that remarkable chef, William Lusk, famous throughout the continent, supervised the preparation of all foods.

"I hope you will enjoy your meal," Janette smiled.

Lanky returned the smile. "I'll feel as if I'm eating at the same table with the Counsellors."

"That's the way you should feel," said Janette. "You may have had some hard luck. But you'll find work again soon, I'm sure. The world needs all of us. Good-bye. Come back if you need to."

She made a little gesture with her white arms, as if asking him to go, warning him that he mustn't linger. But he wasn't ready to obey. He set the tray down.

"Do you think the world needs me?"

He was struck by the depths of sympathy in her pretty, girlish face. She was young—hardly twenty—and so very lovely, with blue eyes matched by the blue velvet evening gown, with dark tresses cascading over her white shoulders.

She was nodding to him, still smiling.

"Everyone has something to give. Will you remember that? It's as true of you as anyone else. I don't know you—you don't know me—but I hope

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I can give you a little of my friendship. Some encouragement may be just what you need. Or perhaps only food—"

"I'll give you something in return," said Lanky. "I can't accept favors unless I can give favors."

"You're very proud, aren't you?" She touched his ragged shoulder lightly. "You and I are different in that way. You see, I was a straggler-without-a-country when the war ended."

"You?"

"I've been through it all." She nodded slowly. "I've heard that the crowds who see me talking with the counsellors think me an aristocrat, a person of high privilege. But these men like you, who come here for food, know that I understand them."

"Thank you for everything." Lanky reached to take her hand. "The Old Man with the whiskers said you were beautiful in spirit—too—"

Her fingertips were warm to the palm of his hand.

"And what is it you're going to remember?" she said.

"I—I can't have forgotten already."

"That everyone has something to give—"

"Yes—yes. I *do* have something to give," he said slowly. "And now I know it's for you."

He drew a small package from his pocket, removed the soiled brown wrapping, opened the ball of fine white tissue paper, brought forth a wide silver bracelet set with eight clear blue sapphires.

"This is for you," he said. "No, please don't try to refuse. Did I refuse your gift of encouragement?"

"But — a bracelet! With such jewels—"

"Is not to be compared with the gift of your friendship. Still, it isn't an ordinary bracelet. I've been told that it bears a certain charm—a charm that works only if its beauty is matched by the beauty of the wearer . . . There. It fits you perfectly."

The girl could hardly speak. "You're giving it to me—to keep?"

"As long as you want it. And now—" he picked up his tray—"I'm nearly famished."

CHAPTER III

Sapphire Lightning

THE first time that Janette noticed the strange warmth of the sapphire bracelet was at noon nearly a week later. She was waiting near an oval window, wondering how soon the Counsellors would come for their midday dinners.

Idly she watched the street crowds. Somehow they made her feel lonely. If she could only have a little more freedom to join them—

"I'm just an ornament," she said to herself. "What chance do I have to get out among people and live my own life? All I'm supposed to do is stay here in my glass cage and look pretty."

Her wistful gaze followed the narrow marble side stairs that zigzagged down to one of the adjacent streets. She felt a longing to race down those steps and run out across the plaza lawn like a child.

Then her wrist fell strangely warm, and she glanced at her bracelet. How bright those sapphires were glowing. Almost as if they were giving off a light of their own.

"Ornaments," she said to herself. "Even these poor homeless men make an ornament of me. I had just as well be a marble statue or a vase—or one of those jardinieres."

Her eyes rested on the two massive blue jardinieres that stood like sentinels

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at the landing of the zigzag side stairs. Their tops, she knew, could be seen from the street. But not their bases. That was why a lazy tramp could snooze his hours away, lying between them and never be noticed. The stairway walls hid him from view.

He was there now, a fat and sleepy pig of a man in bare feet and a dirty orange mechanic's suit, probably cast off by its owner a year or two ago.

Someone was always sleeping there, it seemed, and you could never get anybody to do anything about it. Suddenly Janette felt a resentment toward that tramp, as if he were intentionally blocking her choice avenue of escape.

"I really *do* want to run away," she said to herself. "Run away and meet a handsome man and fall in love!"

Vaguely she had wished such things before. Now all at once all her suppressed wishes were welling up strong—so strong that she was surprised, almost afraid. And the more she wished, the more her sapphire bracelet glowed.

"But I'm just an ornament," she said to herself. It was her duty to be pretty and charming, as the great chef and his wife wanted her to be. Uncle William, she called him.

Dear old Uncle William. He had his ideas about this new post-war world. He didn't believe in feeding tramps. She'd had to fight to win that right.

He believed that the new nations would have their own aristocracy. He had fought his way to this Pink Temple to be one of the country's foremost aristocrats—an aristocrat on the basis of his skills and abilities. In his own estimation he was a nobleman not far removed from kings, presidents, and national managers, because he could prepare the world's finest foods.

"And he wants me to be the world's most charming hostess," Janette sighed. "Wouldn't he be terrified if he knew my secret wish to run away?"

FROM across the glass porch William Lusk's quick footsteps sounded.

"Everything's ready, Janette," he called briskly. He was a merry, round little fellow, with great bushy gray eyebrows and sharp-pointed gray mustaches and beard. He was never intentionally a tyrant, Janette thought. He and his wife had meant well.

"Anything wrong," he asked, always alert to her slightest change of mood. He paced across to the oval window and shot a glance down toward the sleeping tramp.

"I think I'm lonely, Uncle William." She gazed across to the curved sidewalk where pedestrians were passing. A lady was leading a little black spaniel on a leash. Janette wished—

"If I only had a little dog like that to play with—"

Warmth suddenly surged through her wrist. The sapphires of her bracelet gave off a weird glow of blue light. For a moment the glass walls and ceilings caught a tinge of color like the reflection of soft lightning.

William Lusk blinked his wide brown eyes, quite unaware of the source of the passing light.

"A little dog, you say? Look—there comes a little dog on the run. Ha! Right up the steps! Just as you said it! Well, if that isn't a coincidence. But it can't come up here."

William Lusk started toward the stairs.

The little spaniel had jerked away, leash and all, for no apparent reason. It was bouncing up the steps, looking up toward Janette.

The owner called, stood mystified for a moment, then came running after her pet.

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"This won't do," thought Janette. "I wouldn't want to take her property. No. Go back, doggie. Go back to your mamma."

Janette didn't speak the words aloud. But at once the black spaniel stopped, cocked his head curiously, then turned and started off the way he had come.

William Lusk stopped, again mystified by a flicker of blue light that caught the glass porch.

"Did you see that, Janette?"

"That dog?"

"That blue flash."

"I—I think so."

"What was it?"

"I think it was my bracelet."

"Nonsense. How could a bracelet—how could a—m-m-m. *Where* did you get that?"

"Haven't you seen it before?" said Janette evasively. "I've been wearing it for several days."

William Lusk's smile gave way to a fierce burst of temper. The bracelet was like an insult to his parental authority.

"Where did you get it?"

"A friend."

"*What* friend? One of the Counsellors? Which one? Hickering? Or Nigrapp? Or that new man, Molander? No? One of the *married* Counsellors, then."

"Why, Uncle William!"

"Well, four or five of them *are* in love with you, you know. I know two that would divorce their wives in a minute if they thought there was a chance to win you."

"Uncle William!" she almost screamed. "Please don't say such things . . . It wasn't even a Counsellor."

"Who, then? You've no friends that know you well enough to give you such a gift. They've no right. You should have consulted me. Does Mrs. Lusk know?"

"No."

William Lusk breathed heavily with anger. "You're going to tell me who it was."

"I don't even know his name. It was one of the down-and-outers who came by for a handout."

"A tramp!"

"Yes. But very well mannered. I—I rather liked him."

"A tramp! Janette, how could you do such a thing? After all we've done to lift you out of the gutter—"

"I was never in the gutter, Uncle William," Janette said in an even tone.

"After all we've done! You'll get us into no end of trouble. He stole it, of course. You must have realized that. Why on earth—"

"Uncle William, you're shouting. Here come the Counsellors."

"Go to your room, Janette. We'll talk with you later. And don't let anyone see that bracelet. We'll get rid of that."

"But Uncle William, I wish—"

Janette didn't finish, for the sudden warmth of the bracelet against her wrist warned her. For an instant there was a hint of soft blue lightning about her.

Uncle William stood like a wide-eyed statue of bewilderment.

"See," she said. "It seemed to come from—from—"

"Yes—the bracelet. I saw." Strangely his anger was gone. "Don't let the counsellors or anyone see it," he said in a low voice. "We'll talk about it later."

CHAPTER IV

Dangerous to Wish

IN THE deep afternoon shade of the park the sleepy, idle men stirred uneasily. A sound truck disturbed their peace and comfort. It even threatened

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the security of their existence.

That's the third time that blamed noise has woke me up," said a heavily whiskered snoozer who was resting within a few feet of Lanky Louis and the Old Man.

"It was your snoring that woke me up," said Lanky. "You drowned out the sound truck."

"Here it comes again, Lanky," said the Old Man. "When you hear what they're announcing you'll ask the guy to go on snoring."

The blaring music stopped and the big voice boomed from the microphone.

"Calling all able-bodied men who want to work. Apply at the city employment bureau today. Good pay. Begin at once. There is a job for you. No skill required."

Lanky rose up on one elbow. Among the three or four hundred men he could see lying around in the shade, perhaps fifteen or twenty roused up as if mildly interested.

"Lay down," the man with the black whiskers growled at Lanky. "Don't be taken in by none of these fool work calls."

"Why not?"

"Where does it get you?" The man with the black whiskers asked this question in a pessimistic tone that implied there was no answer. He repeated the question several times for the benefit of his neighbor loafers. "You, John, where did it ever get you? You, Alex—"

The argument that followed was almost as loud as the sound-truck amplifiers, in spite of the fact that most of the protagonists were arguing on the same side. Why work? Where does it get you?

Lanky rose to his feet, stretched his arms and took a deep breath.

"Are you really figuring to go get a job?" said the whiskered pessimist.

"I'm thinking about it," said Lanky.

"Do you know what'll happen? They'll get the whole bunch of you together—all fifty or a hundred or however many there are that want work. Then they'll tell you there are only maybe five jobs, and the first five men to get there can have them. So all fifty of you strike out on a footrace, and forty-five of you are suckers."

"Maybe I'd be one of the five," said Lanky thoughtfully.

"Then a week later maybe your job would run out. These pick-up jobs are here today and gone tomorrow. So you'd be a sucker just the same."

LANKY ran his fingers through his shaggy brown hair uneasily.

"I sort of wish I had a job. I wish all of us had jobs. I think we're going to find ourselves out in the cold some day soon."

"I've thought of that myself," said the Old Man. "It isn't a pleasant thought."

The whiskered pessimist was skeptical. "What's in the air?"

"I think," said Lanky, "that the Counsellors are going to do something about us."

"Aw! Slush! Sheep-dip."

"They *could*, you know."

"They're having too easy a time to bother about us. Their bellies get filled four times a day. Ours maybe once a week. Everybody's happy."

"I heard a Counsellor say something one day," said Lanky, "that troubles my sleep. He doesn't like our breed."

"We're no special breed," said the Old Man.

"What do you mean, we're no special breed?" said the pessimist.

"I mean we're all a part of the same tree that gets run through a sawmill. Stragglers like us are the sawdust. We didn't happen to get sawed up into useful timbers. We got thrown out and

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wasted. Why? Not because we're any different kind of wood. Just because the saw happened to hit us."

"Maybe so," said the pessimist, "but you're not going to give young loafers like Lanky, here, the proper pride, teaching things like that. Who saws up these logs anyhow?"

"You were sawing them thick and fast," said Lanky laughing, "until the sound truck came by. . . So long, boys. I'm going to see about a job."

"I'll meet you tonight, then," said the Old Man.

Two hours after dark Lanky jogged across the park to the plaza and found the Old Man waiting at the usual place. There was an air of unusual excitement around the Pink Temple. Lanky sensed it at once.

"What happened?"

"Something nobody knows how to explain," said the Old Man. "You should have seen it. But it all happened so quick—"

"An accident?"

"Not exactly. Anyway none of the guards got hurt. You see, this was the night of the parade drill, getting ready for a reception for some national officers. The band went by, and two companies of guards marched past in their red and white uniforms. But this third company—"

"Well?"

"Well, your friend Janette happened to be looking out the window, and I was thinking to myself, I'll bet she wishes she could get acquainted with some of those handsome young guards. And all at once it happened."

"*What* happened?"

"There was a glow of blue like soft lightning that shone out from the glass porch. And just then three or four guards broke ranks and started for the nearest porch stairway—each one sort of slipping away as if he thought he wouldn't be noticed. But immediately a dozen or so more tried the same thing, and suddenly the whole company turned and made for the porch as if in a body!"

"No! Why, that's a terrible breach of discipline! I never heard of such a thing."

"I say those men were instantly hypnotized!"

"Impossible!"

"You should have seen it. I tell you it was a most unnatural thing. They charged, by heavens, the whole company. They raced. Every guard tried to beat every other guard up the steps. It was amazing!"

The Old Man became so absorbed in recounting the details that he waved his limp arm and waggled his long white beard excitedly.

"They elbowed and pushed and fought. The sidewalk and that first tier of steps were strewn, were fairly alive with tumbling uniforms."

"What did they do when they got up to the porch?"

"Well, I don't know as any of them got all the way up. The stairs go sort of back and forth and the walls block out the view. For some reason they turned around and came straggling back. Yessir, it looked like they all changed their minds at once—right when the lights flashed blue again. They picked themselves up and ran back, and the officers were blowing their whistles like mad, and they all fell into rank again—"

"That bracelet!" Lanky muttered. "Could it have been—"

"What's that you say?" said the Old Man.

"Never mind. I'll see you later. I'm going up closer. I've got to see what's going on around that porch."

"You'll hear a lot of rumors," the Old Man said.

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CHAPTER V

Moonlight and Murder

RUMORS found their way into the Pink Temple that night.

"Janette, they say you are an enchantress."

William Lusk was smiling through his sharp mustaches as he conveyed this shocking news. He seemed to take pride in it.

"They are saying that you have a mysterious gift of mental persuasion. That you can ensnare the mind and will of any man you see, and make him do your bidding. That's what people are saying."

How could Uncle William stand there and laugh while he imparted such shocking news? How dare the people say such things of her. What did they think she was? A sorceress? A witch?

Instinctively she hid her arms behind her. Was it possible that Uncle William had forgotten the bracelet? He had been so deeply engrossed in some new recipes—

"They've no right to talk of me that way," Janette said angrily. "Just because those guards happened to stampede."

"Let the people talk. It's wonderful advertising for me," said William Lusk.

"That Stampede could have been a hoax, you know," said Janette.

"You're an enchantress, dear. Mrs. Lusk and I are quite convinced. We've watched these Counsellors, and they're practically all in love with you."

"I've no desire to be an enchantress. I don't want the Counsellors to be in love with me."

"They neglect the affairs of the city just to come down to our dining halls, to enjoy my food—and your beauty."

"I'm not interested in them."

"And do you know how you have become an enchantress? *It is my achievement.*" Again, the chef's broadest, proudest smile.

"Your achievement? I—I don't understand."

"*My special recipes have given you your beauty and your powers of fascination,*" William Lusk bowed deeply. "If you don't believe it, listen to the rumors. Even my wife believes it—and I almost believe it myself. You realize we have always guarded your diet with an eye to your beauty."

"Yes—I realize—"

"Then—who knows? The world's greatest chef may be even greater than he himself admits. These recent experiments of mine for more desirable vitamin balance—you have been trying my special dishes, haven't you?"

JANETTE began to smile to herself. So he had forgotten the bracelet. He didn't suspect what she had discovered. That the bright sapphires were the source of the strange light and power. That somehow persons hastened to answer her wishes whenever this power reached out to them.

It was at once wonderful and terrifying. What did it mean? Would that kindly tramp who called himself Lanky be able to explain this magic gift to her?

She often saw him, these nights, when the breadlines formed at the service door of the palace. But there was never time for more than a word and a smile. He seemed rather timid, though she felt that he might have lots to say except for the presence of other hungry men.

Janette chose a lightweight sports jacket. The night breeze was almost too warm for a wrap, but Janette wanted sleeves that would come down snugly over her wrists, to hide her bracelet of burning sapphires.

If she could only walk out into the moonlight! A wish? The warmth of

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her bracelet warned her. Wishes could be so full of unexpected consequences. She was learning to guard her thoughts at every turn.

Not so much for herself as for the other persons who might be involved. Like that company of guards early this evening. What an embarrassment she had brought down on them! Would they ever be able to explain to themselves why they had ever taken such a strange turn?

And yet her wish had been simply a harmless impulse. She had only said to herself, "Wouldn't it be gay to be acquainted with all of those handsome guards?" And they had suddenly turned into an upward avalanche of uniforms.

The glass porch was dark now. Many of the plaza's bright lights were off for the night. Moonlight played on the fountains and gave a silvery effect to the dew covered lawns.

"If I were a straggler," Janette thought, "I would be out there walking barefoot in the dewy grass."

The oval windows were open. The fragrant night air was good to her nostrils.

"I'm *not* wishing I were out there," she said to herself determinedly. "I'm *not* wishing someone were here with me —someone like that interesting vagrant named Lanky."

She rested her elbows on the window shelf and gazed dreamily. The air was cool at her wrists except where the bracelet touched. How far did she dare go, she wondered, in thinking—or in denying thoughts—before they became dangerous wishes?

"No one can see me here now," she thought. "Yet somehow I know that Lanky is among the sleeping vagrants—and not far away. And not sleeping."

She mused upon this thought. *How* did she know? Had her wish brought him? Must he be obedient to the powers of the sapphires he had given her?

Or was she mistaken? Perhaps he was miles away. Or perhaps every soul in the park was sound asleep. Wouldn't it be fun to stroll past each sleeper and drop a scented flower on the nose of each, just to be mischievous? And to whisper in each ear, "The enchantress wishes you sweet dreams."

Janette laughed to think what a merry joke this would be. A few hundred parksleepers would wake up in the morning, each to claim a special favor from her.

These gay thoughts led her to the side stairs and, without really meaning to, she started down toward the park.

But at the first landing she recoiled with a gasp of fright. Something shadowy lying between the two jardinieres rose up before her.

"That awful tramp!" she uttered, running up the sairs. "I wish someone would remove him—for good!"

She stood at the porch windows, trembling. The shadowy figure hadn't followed her. Instead, he had risen up and reached some unseen electric switch behind one of the jardinieres.

A FEW lights went on—a thin row around the circular porch and two in nearby corridors. At the same time a soft gong sounded in William Lusk's room.

In a moment the chef was hurrying out to the porch, donning his robe on the run.

"Janette! Janette! Where are you, child?"

"Don't worry, Uncle William." In a flash the meaning of the omnipresent tramp on the stairs had become clear to her. He had been placed there by Uncle William to make sure she didn't stray off the premises. "Don't worry. Your guard is on his job. I didn't get away."

"Thank goodness for that."

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"But wouldn't it be simpler just to build me a jail and throw away the key?"

"Janette, you're angry with me."

"Please do, Uncle William. Put me behind bars and spare my nerves. Then I won't meet any ugly ogres rising up to scare me back into the house."

The dam of her fury was suddenly broken. Her anger was unleashed in a flood of words.

In vain the famous chef tried to protest that it was all for her own good. But his protests weren't equal to the occasion. He paced back into the Temple to call his wife. Her help was badly needed.

For a minute—or two or three—he was gone. Janette stood alone, silent, rehearsing in her mind the facts that had infuriated her.

At once she became aware of certain sensations that had almost escaped her. A car had just pulled away from the curb below the steps—had shot away at high speed. Its roar was still in her ears.

But the more definite sensation was that of strong warmth gradually fading from her wrist.

"I must have wished!" she thought. "*When* did I wish and *what?*"

It was the tramp, of course—the piggish looking man in the orange rags who was Uncle William's secret guard. She had wished him removed.

She ran to the stairs, started down the first flight, swiftly, cautiously—

In the dim light—Lanky! He was half crouched above the fallen figure of the trampish guard. Lanky's fingers clung loosely to a short, bright dagger, dripping blood.

The soiled mechanic's uniform of the fallen man was gashed in the left side, and the black blotch around the gash was spreading.

Lanky heard Janette's faltering footsteps. He looked up.

"The poor fellow's gone, I'm afraid. I hope to heaven you saw it happen. Otherwise it might look bad for me."

"I didn't see—no—I didn't see anything. Not even you. Quick—God . . . but the dagger—"

"It's mine. I'll take it. I might need it." Lanky looked back at the dying man. "Too bad. Uncalled for."

"Go, Lanky. *Hurry!*"

CHAPTER VI

Prison Hours

MOLANDER strode down the prison corridor and stopped to look in at Lanky. The handsome Counsellor's lips curled in a cruel taunt.

"Comfortable, my friend?"

"Yes, thank you," Lanky said with a cool restraint.

"Did they bring you a good breakfast?"

"I have eaten all I cared to eat. I really wasn't very hungry."

"No reflections on our food, I hope. We try to give the best of service. Not quite as fancy as the dishes Lusk and Janette hand out to you bums at the service door. But this is a prison. It's the best we can do for misguided fools who trespass and take chances and get careless with their weapons."

The emotion gathered like threatening thunder in Molander's voice as he divested himself of this speech. As if daring Lanky to murmur an answer.

Lanky met his eyes and answered, quite calmly, "I never knew my dagger to be quite so rash."

"Well put," said Molander, breathing more easily. "See that you put it that way when they question you. And no fancy alibis, you understand."

"No, I don't understand." Lanky didn't say it defiantly, but question-

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ingly. Nevertheless, the effect upon Molander was like an electric shock.

"You'd better understand," he said in a low, quavering command. "All you need to say is that you gave way to an uncontrollable impulse to murder the tramp that guarded the stairs. Don't complicate your story by devising any motives. That guard barred the way. You were fascinated by *her,* and there he was on the steps. That's all you'll say. Every Counsellor will understand."

Lanky studied the young Counsellor's determined face. The slight nervous twitches of his lips were hardly perceptible. He would rush this trial through with the same rashness that characterized his every move. Any obstacles thrown in his path would be rolled under.

"You could have saved yourself a lot of trouble, Lanky Louis, if you had hit the road," Molander went on, now with a boldness that stung deep. "Nine tramps out of ten would have given the police a better run for their money. But you—you have to be picked up right in the plaza park, washing the blood off your dagger at the drinking fountain."

Lanky paced back and forth in his cell, trying hard not to be badgered into blurting anything his good judgment told him not to say. But Molander tarried, trying to make sure his plan of trial was clinched.

"Whatever I say, I've no doubt I'll be shot," said Lanky. "You Counsellors have the authority. I can see you're anxious to use it, to make an impression on all the tramps in the city."

"That, I admit, should be one of the valuable by-products of your punishment."

"Will it make any difference that I had applied for work?"

"You didn't get it."

"I tried."

"Ha." Molander was unimpressed.

"If the Counsellors have me shot they may bring down unforeseen troubles on their heads. Even dead men sometimes lead revolts, according to some histories.

"Now, that's good. A tramp trying to feed history to a Counsellor. That's your habit, my friend. Always overreaching yourself. I noticed it from the first afternoon I picked you up." Molander gave a scornful laugh and started off. But his anxiety over what Lanky might tell was again apparent, and he turned to toss back one tempering, tantalizing remark. "I haven't *said* you'll be shot. I'm a man of power and influence. You play this thing my way."

With that, he strode away.

LATE that night, Lanky lay awake listening to echoes of midnight festivities beyond the plaza. It wasn't easy, counting the slow quarter-hours that chimed from the tower clock, wondering and waiting for the kind of justice that was meant for tramps.

Familiar voices could be heard, now, from the prison entrance. William Lusk and his wife, and Janette—

"I know it's against the rules." That was Janette, arguing with the prison guards. "But I do so *wish* you'd let me see him."

A glow of blue lightning reflected through the corridor, for an instant changing the pattern of moonlight that showered in from the corridor window.

A few minutes later Janette was before him, holding both his hands through the bars, tilting her pretty face up to him. Anxiety and sometimes tears were there, but smiles of courage too. There was so much to talk about. And so little time.

There were so many rumors sweeping over the plaza, so many stories filling the radiocasts and news columns.

"There's talk of ridding the city of

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every jobless man," Janette said. "They say this incident shows how the fighting and irresponsibility and lawlessness are spreading. A murder within the plaza, right on the steps of the Pink Temple. It's unclean, they say. It's time to rid the whole city of its dregs."

"I'm not surprised," Lanky smiled patiently. He held her hands tightly. "Do you still have the bracelet?"

She drew back the sleeve of her sports jacket. The sapphires splashed lively moonlight in his eyes.

"Hasn't anything happened," he asked, "to make you afraid to wear it?"

Her anxious eyes flicked back and forth from the gems to his steady, questioning gaze. "You asked me to wear it. I—I've wondered if you knew what a strange, terrible power—"

"I'm afraid I didn't realize," said Lanky, "just what the legend implied. The charm had been dead for years. But that was because the beauty of the sapphires hadn't been matched—not for generations — until the bracelet was placed upon your arm."

"You know its whole history, then?"

"If I only might live long enough to tell you. Centuries ago the Turkish dynasties rose and fell as the charm of these sapphires played upon the fortunes of rulers. There were enchantresses in those days too, I've been told." His arms drew her close against the bars. "But never one like you, I'm sure."

Her lovely face was close to his. If there was no glow of blue lightning from the sapphires, it was because he gave her no time to wish for a kiss. He was kissing her. His arms were about her.

Then they were whispering. "If I have the power to wish," she said, "I wish these bars would dissolve and you were free of all this trouble."

The blue lightning glowed, then, but no bars dissolved.

"Troubles aren't swept away that easily, dear," he said. "There's no easy way out for a tramp in trouble. I'll go through with this. I'll learn for myself the ways of justice."

From the prison entrance the voices of William Lusk and his wife could be heard. It was time for Janette to go.

"I—I must talk with you again before the trial," she said. "There is something you must know. There may be a way out, Lanky, for *you*—"

CHAPTER VII

Jittery Counsellors

SIXTEEN Counsellors met for five minutes on the fourth floor of the building with the big copper dome. Then met and heard the news and dissolved into committees.

The news came from the national manager. His letter informed them that he would be unable to make the visit to their city, as planned, but that his excellent and able secretary, L. Van Voorhees would come.

The president of the Counsellors read the letter to his fellow members, assembled. Then—

"We must make preparations swiftly. A few trifling matters, such as the Pink Temple murder, have engaged us too long. We have no time to lose. There must be speeches of welcome for the national manager's personal representative. Those of you who are acquainted with the honorable L. Van Voorhees will meet with me in the first committee room at once."

Ten minutes later the Counsellors were called out of their committee rooms into general assembly. The president was agitated.

"Let me repeat," he said, "that any of you having the remotest acquaint-

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ance with Van Voorhees must meet with me to make plans. We must be ready to pull the right strings. This secretary will carry his impressions straight back to the national manager. How many of you know him?"

No one spoke up.

"I repeat, who knows Van Voorhees?"

No one knew him. Molander volunteered that the man was known to be publicity-shy; that he had no reason to push himself into the public spotlight, because he served the national manager as an appointed expert.

"That's the very reason," said the president, "that we've got to make a perfect impression."

"Then the first thing to do," said Molander, "is to take action to drive our tramps out of town. Why don't we hold a swift trial for the tramp that pulled the dagger murder? That will help clean our slate for the secretary's inspection."

"We need to know that secretary in advance," the president repeated, ignoring Molander's suggestion. And he forthwith adjourned the meeting and ordered every Counsellor to dig into the files and find out what they could about the publicity-shy Mr. Van Voorhees.

Two hours later, as they gathered around the official table on the porch of the Pink Temple, they called for William Lusk. Someone had found, in a printed biography of Van Voorhees, that the famous chef had once been employed by the Van Voorhees family.

"Tell us what to expect, Lusk."

"I advise you," said Lusk, swelling with aristocratic importance, "that you should have everything in the best of order. As a boy he was very systematic and thorough. He used to clean the house for his parents. Very thorough."

The Counsellors groaned. This remark sounded ominous. He might come here to clean house.

But William Lusk admitted that he hadn't known young Van Voorhees since he was a boy; in fact, wouldn't expect to be remembered by him. "I distinctly remember that he was fond of ice cream cones and taffy candy—especially by my recipes."

The Counsellors saw no help here. They returned to the earlier suggestion of Molander that a quick settlement of the overhanging murder case might be an effective stroke. It was Milton Molander's hour to be popular, and he felt called on to make a speech.

"Back of this drive for swift justice to a tramp murderer," he said, "is my drive to sweep the whole caboodle of tramps out of the city. No mercy for any of them . . ."

He kept his eyes on Janette all the time he talked, and he was still talking when the police investigators barged in.

IT WAS pandemonium for the rest of that day. The police investigators had hundreds of questions for everyone, and they found the Counsellors in a mood to give generously. They had to recheck on all the questions they'd asked immediately after the murder. They also had to know what there was to all of these rumors running rife over the city.

Was it true that that group of guards charged the palace a few nights before on account of some spell of enchantment cast by Janette? Was it true that several of the Counsellors were in love with her? That some had proposed to her? That other intended to?

News cameramen followed in to get the full benefit of Counsellors acknowling their love for the beautiful girl, or reciting proposals, or having heart palpitations. The newspapers and newsreels would have juicy filler for days to come. The fact was that the air was now filled with a dull blue light that had

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come so gradually as to be unnoticed.

And all the while Janette was chiding herself. It was pure mischief on her part, *wishing* to know how many of these Romeo Counsellors had fallen for her. Strange to say, those who hadn't were almost apologetic before the police and the reporters.

"And now let's have a look at the bracelet," said one of the investigators.

Janette didn't see what happened now.

This wasn't the first time they had asked about the bracelet. Early in their investigation they had regarded it carefully—even measured it and laid out the pattern of its stones on paper.

Now they again asked her to remove it for a moment's examination. She complied.

She didn't see Molander nodding to them, giving them the cue. She didn't see the bracelet *exchanged for a duplicate,* constructed on the identical pattern.

"Here you are, Miss Janette." One of the investigators handed her what she took to be her bracelet. Molanders' cleverness had scored. She never suspected.

CHAPTER VIII

Trigger Justice

A SOUND truck swung around the park advertising the need for a few unskilled workers, but none of the park bums heard or paid any attention. They had too many pressing matters to talk over. Slowly they had awakened to the fact that what became of Lanky Louis might have some effect on them.

"He was a good fellow," said the Old Man with the white whiskers. "I wish there was something we could do."

"He was too ambitious," said a black-whiskered pessimist. "I saw he didn't have the makings of a good park bum when he walked off and tried to get a job."

"His real trouble was, he went off his nut about that enchantress," someone else volunteered.

"No chance for him now," said the Old Man. "If you're wealthy and have friends in the government, there's always a chance of pulling out of trouble. People like that can afford to take a few risks. But not down-and-outers like us. If we make a bad gamble the law is right there to sock us."

Radio newscasts carried the story that the trial had been held and that Lanky Louis had been found guilty. (This news grapevined around the park within a few minutes after it was broadcasted.) He would be executed by bullet.

"There you are," said the Old Man. "They'll have him shot before that big party of national government people get here. That way they can point to us and say, 'We're cleaning them up'."

Execution or no execution, the reception for the national secretary and twenty high-ranking officers and guards must be ready when they arrived. William Lusk was beside himself with importance, checking the details.

A telephone call announced that the national party was about to reach the city, and would proceed directly to the government building, arriving only a few minutes late.

The Counsellors had Lanky Louis brought into the first committee room, just off the hall from the gayly decorated reception room.

While Lanky stood waiting, his hands bound, the Counsellors drew lots to see which of them would do the deed.

One by one the Counsellors opened the slips of paper. Janette came in just in time to see the last few slips drawn from the hat.

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"I've asked some of my friends to come up for a moment," she said to the president of the Counsellors, "to witness—"

"All right, all right. But don't bother us."

Molander spoke up. "Here it is—the fatal slip. The shooting falls to me."

A HALF dozen Counsellors lined up on either side. The rest stood back of Molander. He drew his gun and advanced slowly to the center of the room, where Lanky Louis stood, eyeing him defiantly.

Slow, creaky footsteps came from the back stairs at the end of the corridor and approached the committee room. Molander paused, his gun hand at his hip. Other footsteps were following.

"What is this?" said Molander. He was like a temperamental golf artist, awaiting complete quiet before taking a stroke.

Into the committee room came the ragged, white-bearded Old Man. Other tramps filed in back of him. More of them, until there were all of two hundred thronged at the doorways.

"Before you shoot him," said the Old Man, "we figured you'd like to know something."

"It's out of order," said Molander. But the president said, "Let's see what they want."

"We've got a proposition," said the Old Man. "We figure you're about to execute him because you hate all of us. If you'll change your mind, *we'll go to work.*"

"Idle promises," said Molander. "You'll stand where you are and be witnesses to this execution. I am now ready—"

"You mill *miss,*" Janette said in a voice full of tears and righteous rage. "I *wish* you to miss. I wish your hand to go paralyzed if you try to pull that trigger."

"Ha," Molander said coldly without looking at her. He steadied the gun. But she suddenly cried out with such a fury of words that he and everyone else turned to listen.

"*I'm the guilty one, believe me.* It was this strange power of mine. I wished the guard on the steps to be removed — and the sapphires of my bracelet did it. They commanded my wish to be fulfilled."

Lanky Louis shook his head. "She didn't do it."

"I'm guilty, I tell you," she repeated. "I didn't mean to wish him dead. I only wished him removed—but it was this power—"

Molander demanded silence. "The court has pronounced sentence on this tramp. If your wishes have any power, go ahead. *Make* me miss this shot."

"I can do it. You'll see."

His lips curled scornfully. "Very well, show me."

He held the gun within three feet of Lanky's head. He pulled the trigger. There was no electric blue in the air—just the flash of red gunfire.

The Old Man was right beside him as it happened. And for all his years of age and flowing white whiskers and limp old arms, the Old Man was as quick as a cat. He flung an arm upward just as the pistol cracked.

The shot went up. It crashed through a chandelier and struck the ceiling. A little shower of glass and a flake of plaster fell to the floor.

"Guards! Guards!" the president of the Counsellors shouted. He thought there was going to be an open fight—that two hundred tramps were only waiting the Old Man's gesture.

But the tramps stood silent and sullen, and the Counsellors and guards who had suddenly drawn their guns in self defense looked a little foolish.

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Just then the roll of drums and blare of trumpets sounded from somewhere down the palace hallways. The party of Secretary Van Voorhees had arrived.

CHAPTER IX

The Reception

THE entrance of the party from the national government would long be remembered. It would be remembered *by* the party itself, every officer, guard, drummer and trumpeter. And by sixteen Counsellors, caught inexplicably in the company of two hundred ragged down-and-outers—caught in the middle of an execution that hadn't quite come off.

Newshawks and cameramen poked their heads in at the side doors to catch every detail of this meeting between city and nation. One of the newsmen jotted the opening lines of his account; three others read it over his shoulder:

"The national manager's party arrived in full dress and marched to their own swanky fanfare into the sanctum of the Counsellors which resembled a shambles. Probably no reception in history requiring so much preparation and money ever bore so little resemblance to a reception. Two hundred tramps had drifted in from somewhere. By way of greeting to the starchy national party they stood awkwardly in open-mouthed wonderment. The national manager stayed at home and we don't blame him. From this angle it looks as if his secretary, the honorable Van Voorhees, is also missing."

Janette brushed aside several Counsellors who had chosen this confused moment to ask her company at the reception banquet. She made the president of the Counsellors listen to her.

"Tell me, which one of you is Van Voorhees? I'm going to appeal this case to him. Can't he stop this execution, if I tell him I'm the guilty one?"

The president of the Counsellors may have heard her, but he was trying to wave everyone to silence and at the same time order the tramps back into another room and confer with William Lusk about changing the time of the dinner.

Then getting himself under control, the president of the Counsellors stepped forward from the confused circle, and asked which of the party was the honorable Van Voorhees.

The spokesman stepped out from the ranks of the national party, and his eyes passed slowly over the circle of guards, tramps, chefs, and Counsellors.

"The honorable Van Voorhees preceded us. He is already here among you, incognito. May I have the honor to present the national secretary, Louis Van Voorhees."

The spokesman pointed to Lanky Louis.

Lanky's hands were still tied behind him. Yet he managed to bow graciously. Janette's heart was fluttering, her mind whirling, her ears hearing words she could hardly believe.

"I am your humble servant, Louis Van Voorhees. I have been among you for several days, observing how you live and work together. How you, the Counsellors, govern your citizens. How you, the idle men of the parks, respond to the tolerant treatment that is given you. It has been revealing, to say the least."

THE frozen silence that had caught the whole group from his first words was now broken only by the slightest hums of discomfort from men who felt the weight of these words.

"As to you men in the service of the government, I have tried to observe which of your are sincere, and which

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are only seeking pleasures or vain glories."

The uncomfortable breathing deepened, and a few groans were audible.

"During the last few days," Lanky Louis went on, now turning his gaze toward Milton Molander, "I have had the interesting experience of undergoing a trial for murder—and very nearly an execution. You, Mr. Molander, are not as resourceful a Counsellor as the national manager hoped you would be. He will be disappointed to hear you are so rash."

Molander's face went white, like something chilled to stone. But he was able to blurt hot words in a fury of temper.

"I don't care who you are. I've got a verdict on you. You can't change that! It was your dagger!"

"It was I!" Janette cried. "My wish! I'm the one!"

Lanky's calm voice commanded silence. "If your wish is so powerful, why don't you wish that the guilty party confess."

"I do wish it, with all my heart." Janette held up her bracelet wrist.

"But don't waste your wish on those imitation sapphires," Lanky said, smiling. "The real bracelet is in Molander's pocket."

"A lie!" Molander bluffed.

"Yes, in your pocket. That's your own little scheme, Molander, for keeping sapphires and justice apart."

"I'm a Counsellor. No one has any right to search—

As Molander spoke, his hand moved toward his coat pocket. His fingertips barely touched, and instantly the sapphire bracelet flashed blue light. It slid up over his hand and caught on his wrist, and there it tightened. Everyone saw it happen.

And they saw the look of pain come into Molander's face.

"It's burning!" he cried. "Stop it. It's burning my arm."

"The charm of that bracelet is centuries old," said Lanky, "and wonderfully unpredictable. A few words of truth might stop the burning."

"What truth?"

"Confess."

"All right. I killed the trampish guard on the steps.

"How?"

"With your dagger. I'd been waiting there in the shadows in my car, waiting for a chance. I knew the guard was there. I saw how easy it would be to murder him and hang the deed on some passing tramp."

"Why did you want to do such a thing?"

"Because I hate these tramps. I've wanted to wipe them out. And I knew the public would be back of me if they could be made to hate the tramps. There's nothing like a nasty murder in high places. I would have a cause, then. I'd be all the more a hero for exterminating them. And no one would know—"

"All right, what did you do?"

"I saw a tramp coming down the walk. It was you."

"Yes, go on."

"You told me you were coming up to ask this guard on the steps if he wouldn't like to take a walk."

"That's right," said Lanky. "I meant to talk him into finding a less conspicuous place to sleep."

"So here was my chance. I knew you. I thought you were an easy mark. I knew you carried a dagger. I struck you on the back of the head with my fist. For a moment you were dazed. In that moment I did it. You were still looking dizzy when I put the dagger back in your hand. I sped away, telling myself you wouldn't dare talk. I'd scare you out."

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"Because I was a tramp and you were a Counsellor."

"Yes. And it might have worked if—Can't you stop this thing from burning my arm? . . ."

THE reception turned out to be the first affair of its kind on record, for two hundred tramps were invited to stay and share a dinner with government officials.

One Counsellor was, as the saying goes, conspicuous by his absence. He had found retirement behind nice, quiet, round steel bars. Several other Counsellors were low on appetites, uncertain what the national manager might hear about them.

William Lusk sat proudly with the guest of honor and devoted most of the conversation to complimenting his own food.

Janette had found a place at the table of Louis Van Voorhees also.

"Tell me, Uncle William, did you forget you were going to make me give the bracelet back. Don't you remember, you were so sure that my favorite tramp stole it."

She and Lanky exchanged winks as they watched Uncle William squirm. But he surprised them.

"Child, as soon as I dusted off my memory, I *knew*. I knew that your favorite tramp must be the same youngster whose meals I used to prepare, only now he was grown up. And the more I thought about it, the more I couldn't believe that a boy reared on my fine foods could ever become a tramp. . . . Yes, Louis, I remember that bracelet. Your family used to handle it like dynamite."

"We'll put it away for our future generations," said Lanky Louis. "As far as I'm concerned, Janette's an enchantress without it."

THE END

A MONK'S DREAM

By W. N. HANSEN

IN THE confines of his bare cell, on his walks in the garden of the monastery and through the countryside, Francesco de Lana could be seen gazing from time to time at the sky above. His actions were not to be regarded with suspicion, for in other men's eyes his thoughts were on God.

Truly, his thoughts were on God. He was thinking of the great work his Creator had done in the building of the Earth. In 1670 the vast ocean of air that stretched above him and separated him from the Kingdom of Heaven caused him to dream and to speculate. God had given that air mysterious power, and if properly utilized perhaps one day man would be able to do good work with that power.

He reasoned, constructively, that "no air" was lighter in weight than "some air." He thought that if he could remove the air from spherical containers, those containers would be buoyed upward. He proposed vacuum ballons consisting of four sheet copper spheres twenty feet in diameter, each sphere being less than one two-hundreth of an inch thick. Theoretically, the weight of the metal in the skin of such a sphere would be less than the weight of the air that could be removed from its interior, and therefore the vacuum-filled shells could rise in the air.

Francesco de Lana overlooked at least one important fact. As soon as he would start to remove the air, the external pressure on the sphere would cause it to collapse. Reinforcement offered no solution, for an effective reinforcing thickness would bring the weight of the spheres so far in excess of the weight of the air that it would be impossible for the structure to leave the ground.

De Lana never attempted to construct a model of his machine and so he was not aware of its impracticalities. Although elevation by means of a vacuum was proved possible when pursued further, De Lana later dropped all thought of air machines. He came to the popular conclusion of his time that if God had wanted man to ascend into the Heavens, he would have provided him with a natural means of locomotion. It was the God-given privilege of the sparrow and the eagle to flit about freely in the skies; man was destined to roam upon the face of the earth until death took him.

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Vignettes OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Torricelli

"Lighter than air" was only a witty saying until this physicist weighed the air and gave a comparative basis

EVANGELISTA TORRICELLI, Italian physicist and mathematician, was born at Faenza on October 15, 1608. In 1627 he went to Rome to study science under the Benedictine Benedetto Castelli, professor of mathematics at the Collegio di Sapienza. Working under this favorite disciple of Galileo, he attracted the attention of the latter—now in his old age and blind—and was invited to join him at his Florentine home and become his assistant and secretary or amanuensis. Upon the death of the philosopher, Torricelli succeeded to his professorship in the University of Florence, which position he held until his death at the early age of 39 years.

His principal contribution to science was the demonstration of the weight of the atmosphere by means of the mercurial barometer, of which he was the inventor. This discovery which has perpetuated his fame was made in 1643.

As far back as the days of the old Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, it was known that the atmosphere possessed that quality, even when in a quiescent state, because it exhibited power when in motion; but the amount of its weight was unknown. Both Galileo and Torricelli were aware of the fact that, by suction, water could be lifted in a tube to the height of 32 to 33 feet, and had deducted from it that the pressure exerted by the atmosphere on the surface of the water in a well, must be in the vicinity of 15 pounds to the square inch; and the former had expressed the opinion that the principle, if accurately demonstrated, might be usefully employed in measuring the variations in this pressure due to storms, and to altitudes above sea level. But the mechanical difficulties connected with the manufacture and installation of a glass tube of that length, were not easy to overcome at the time.

In the year following Galileo's death, Torricelli took up the problem again, and thought of the idea of substituting mercury for water. Knowing that the weight of the metal was thirteen to fourteen times that of an equal volume of water, he reasoned that a tube one-thirteenth the length of that which would be required if water was employed, or, about 30 inches, would answer when using mercury. Such a tube of glass with a fairly uniform bore, was, by then, within the capacity of the manufacturers. Accordingly he procured one about a yard in length, closed it at one end, and filled it with the metal. Then, inverting it in a vessal filled with liquid metal, he had the satisfaction of seeing the column sink down to a height of about 30 inches as expected, leaving a vacancy above it in the tube, which became known as the Torricellian vacuum.

On the foundation of this simple principle, modified to meet the various demands made upon it as an instrument of precision, all the varieties of the modern mercurial barometer are based, which are used not only for ascertaining the changes in weight of the ocean of air surrounding the globe, but also the elastic pressure of all kinds of gasses.

Torricelli is also thought to have been one of the first to work out correctly the principle of the simple microscope, and to construct one that would yield practical results. His principle was developed by Antony van Leeuwenhoek of Holland (1632-1723), who is said to have made over two hundred very efficient instruments of one lens only. For the modern high power microscope, however, the world had to wait until the first quarter of the 19th century, during which period the art of lens grinding and polishing was highly advanced, and makers of the instrument learned how to combine them, so as to correct almost perfectly their chromatic effect on light.

Torricelli was brought into controversy with G. P. deRoberval as to the priority of the solution of a problem on the properties of a cycloid. He wrote on fluid motion, on the theory of projectiles and on the motion of two bodies connected by a string passing over a fixed pulley. He also used and developed B. Cavalieri's method of indivisibles.

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By DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

IN THE newspaper business you run into a lot of funny people. Some of them—as often advertised—are interesting, others highly ordinary, and still others plain bores. However, in all my years on the *Record-Times* I don't think I ran into anyone like this little screwball who came waltzing into my office that balmy afternoon in May.

Caroline, my secretary, beat him through my door by about half a minute.

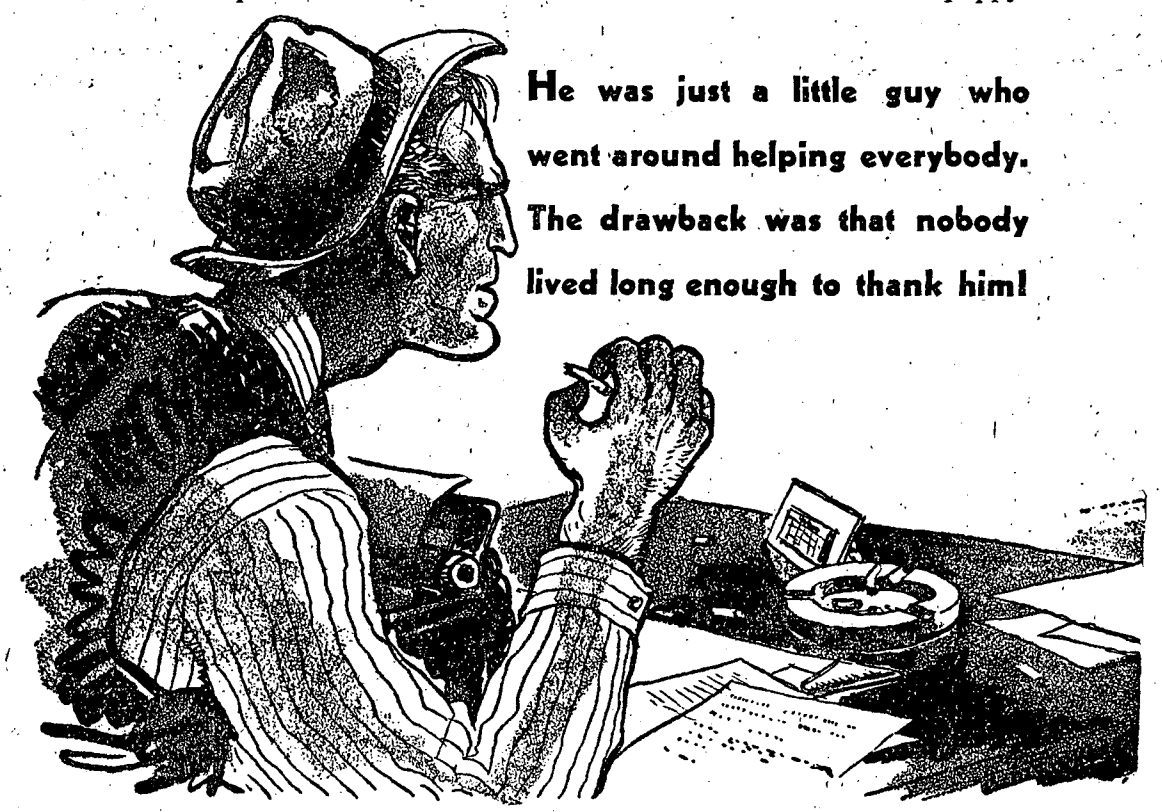
"There's a gentleman outside," she said, very flustered, "who insists that you won't mind seeing him without an appointment."

"What's his name?" I demanded.

But Caroline didn't get a chance to answer. By that time this little refugee from a red corpuscle had skittered through the door at her heels, oozed around her, and planted himself in front of my desk.

"If I hadn't been so miffed at his intrusion, I'd have burst out laughing at his appearance.

He was, as I said, a little guy, strictly little in every respect, even to weight. This, in itself, was neither funny nor unfunny. His face, however, was something else again. It was the face of one of those elves you see painted on Christmas cards, or running around in a Walt Disney movie. Ugly and kindly and pert and bewilderedly determined. It was a long, horse-like fizz, with a long, red nose and wide pale gray eyes. The nose had the watery sniffle of a bloodhound, and the eyes owned a misty uncertainty that might have been found in a week-old puppy.



He was just a little guy who went around helping everybody. The drawback was that nobody lived long enough to thank him!

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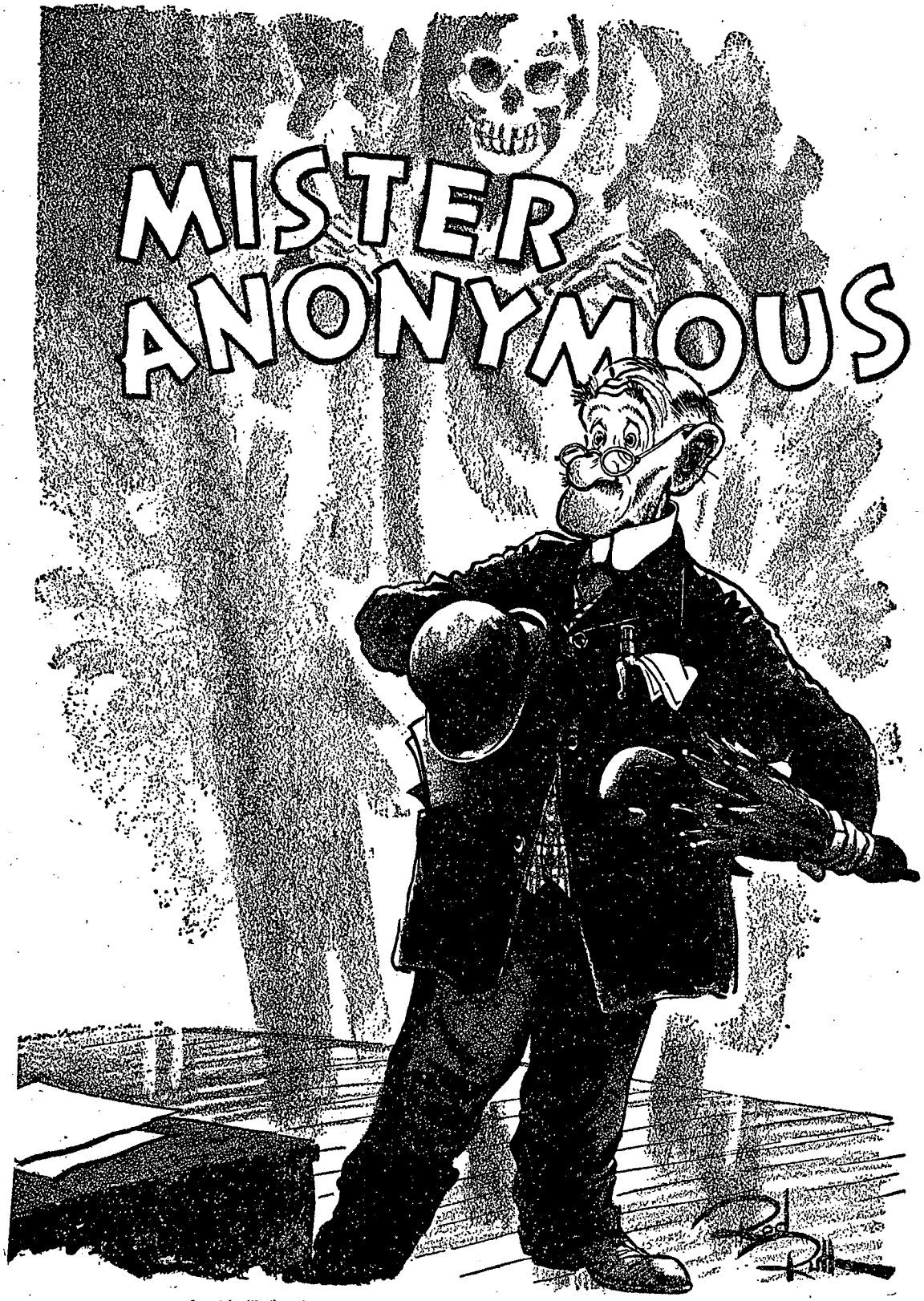

I said: "Why don't you lay off helping people? You'll be the death of me yet!"

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His chin, somewhat steam-shovelish, was outthrust combatively, and his wide mouth carried a lopsided grin.

I thought of a line I'd read somewhere.

"One fist raised to strike, one foot poised for flight."

"Hello," he said. He had a small voice, slightly on the squeaky side.

"Hello. Who the hell told you you could barge in here without an appointment?" I demanded.

"Oh, an appointment," the little guy said. He ran a long, gnarled finger that seemed all knuckles under an oversized celluloid collar. "The young lady said something about an appointment. But an appointment isn't important," he said firmly, then added, uncertainly, "is it?"

I gave Caroline the high sign to clear out, and she closed the door, stepping into the outer office and leaving us alone.

"Okay," I said. "What's your name?"

The little guy smiled, nervously smoothing the lapels of his black serge too-large suitcoat.

"My name?" he squeaked.

"Yeah. Your name."

"Oh," he said. "Oh. Well, names aren't important, are they?"

"Your telling me, or asking me?" I demanded.

He grinned foolishly. "I know your name. That's why I'm here. You're Fred Talbot. You write a daily column called *Around & About People.*"

"That's right," I agreed. "And right now I'm very busy getting out my column for tomorrow. I've a deadline to meet, and not much time. If you have anything to say, get it off your chest now."

"I wanted to say," said my visitor, taking a deep, tremulous breath, "that I like your column very much."

"Thank you. Is that all?"

"N-no, not exactly. I wanted to say that you get a very sympathetic, human touch to your column. You see so much misery, so much misfortune, yet so much that is good and so much that is happy. You have an eye for justice and injustice. You seem to know where any form of joy or tragedy can be found."

"A very pretty speech," I said, not nearly as irritated as I sounded. "It was nice hearing. Now, if you don't mind, I'll get back to work."

"But, I haven't told you why I'm here," the little guy protested quickly.

THIS conversational croquet was getting me down.

"Look—" I began.

"I want to ask your permission to accompany you through the week, as you—ah—explore the city for—ah—material for your column," the little screwball said in a garrison finish of words.

I put down the pencil with which I'd been abstractedly fiddling. Very patiently, I asked:

"Why?"

The little guy looked distraught, spread his hands in a gesture that was a combination of Stan Laurel and Zazu Pitts.

"So I can help," he said.

"Help? Help what? Help me write my column, is that it? Have I got another embryo columnist on my hands?"

He shook his head. "Oh, no. Oh, my no. You write your column about people. But you can't help them. You can only point to their plight, or explain their distress. I would *help* them. I would do good turns."

Now it was clear. I'd run into this specimen before.

"Ahhhh, a do-gooder," I said. "A

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Boy Scout. A social Florence Nightingale. I see what you mean."

"You do?" he squeaked eagerly. "You do? That's wonderful. I am so very happy you do. You see, I'd never know where to look to do good on my own. I'm rather a stranger. You can take me with you wherever you go, and that way I'll find people to help."

I threw the pencil down on the desk. I stood up, giving him my best belligerent scowl.

"Okay. I've let you have quite a little bit of my time. I was crazy, but that's my fault. Now please beat it. At once. And as for your idea of hanging around in my hair, the answer is NO!"

I concluded my ultimatum by making the last word a hoarse bellow. It so frightened the little guy that he turned and bolted from the office like a rabbit who's just stepped on a snake.

Caroline poked her head in through the door an instant later.

"What on earth did you do?" she demanded. "Snap your store teeth at him?"

I gave her a nasty look. "A fine secretary you are," I sneered. "Can't ward off undesirables; can't even get them to give their names!"

"What was his name?" Caroline asked, sweetly contrite.

"I dunno," I said. "He wouldn't tell me, I—" I looked up and saw her grinning triumphantly.

"Then how did you expect him to tell poor me?" she demanded.

I glared at her. "Stop baiting me!"

"Honestly, what did he want?"

I told her, and she giggled.

"I think that was sweet of him to want to help," she said. "You should have let this little Mr.—ah—"

"Anonymous," I supplied.

"That's cute," Caroline said. "Mr. Anonymous. You should have let him tag around with you. You'd be a cute team. *Around and About People,* by Fred Talbot and Mr. Anonymous. That would be cute."

"Eight years ago you were overusing that word 'cute'," I said. "You still are. Beat it."

Caroline closed the door. Half a minute later she opened it again and poked her head into my office.

"Mr. Talbot?"

I ground my teeth. "What?"

"Do you suppose he's the Anonymous who writes all those poems, and sends all those flowers, and nasty notes to editors of newspapers?"

"Yes!" I bellowed. "Get out!"

IT WAS just as well for my peace of mind that I was able to forget little Mr. Anonymous within the next hour or so. My column got sticky on me, and it took about four rewrite jobs to starch it out, thereby holding my nose to the grindstone for over three solid hours.

By the time I was through and sent the copy off with a boy, the building had reached that semi-quiet state that indicated the day's work was done and the last edition was off the presses and almost everybody with any brains had gone home except yours truly.

Caroline, being a punctual secretary, had left an hour before, so I locked up the office and rode down to the lobby with the elevator man and comments on the weather for company.

Out in the street I looked for a cab, then changed my mind and decided on a relaxer or two at Trumbo's Tavern across the street. I was in the process of crossing against the red light, when I saw a furtive figure step back into a doorway on the other side of the street.

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Something made me look twice.

It was little Mr. Anonymous.

I hesitated, then decided to ignore him. I continued across the street, my eyes fixed on the entrance of Trumbo's Tavern. But I wasn't able to ignore him completely, and found myself taking an occasional furtive glance at the figure in the doorway.

Then Mr. Anonymous left the doorway quickly, as furtively as he'd entered it, and started rapidly off down the street. It occurred to me, then, that maybe little Anonymous was avoiding me just as determinedly as I'd been ignoring him.

I was in front of Trumbo's, now, but I stopped and stood there staring after the little screwball. He was passing a parking lot, where old Pete Calkins, a familiar blind beggar in the neighborhood sat on the edge of the sidewalk with a hat full of pencils.

Suddenly Mr. Anonymous paused, looked quickly back over his shoulder, reached into his coat pocket, brought forth something, and tossed it into old Pete's hat. Then he broke into a run.

I was so surprised I didn't get into motion before he'd lost himself around the corner.

I drew up in front of blind old Pete a minute later. The old man was muttering to himself and pawing at something in his hat. His weatherbeaten old face was a weird mixture of emotions.

"This is Fred Talbot, Pete," I said. "What's wrong? What did that guy do?"

Old Pete looked up at the sound of my voice.

"Mr. Talbot, Mr. Talbot," old Pete said, "what is this? Tell me what this is."

I looked at what the old beggar was holding in his hand. It was a thick wad of crisp green currency, rolled tightly and secured by a rubber band.

"Why—why it's money, Pete. A hell of a lot of money, from the looks of it."

The old man was gulping tremulously.

"I—I didn't dare believe it," he said hoarsely. "How much money, Mr. Talbot? Tell me how much money."

I took the roll, snapped off the band. The outside bill was a hundred. I'd noticed that when I'd first glimpsed it. The other bills in the roll, nineteen more, were also hundreds.

"Two thousand dollars, Pete," I said. "The man gave you two thousand bucks."

I've never seen a face so torn with inexpressible emotions as old Pete's was at that instant. He was trying to speak, trying to say something, but he was so choked up he could only blubber. I was watching his reaction so closely that I didn't notice his rapidly changing complexion until half a minute later. By that time it was going from white to blue.

"Pete!" I exclaimed. "Pete, what's the trouble?"

By that time the old beggar's gnarled hand had clutched at his heart, and his chin slumped to his chest. I watched him slide slowly sideward until he lay inertly on the sidewalk.

"Pete!" I cried in horror.

But Pete's heart wasn't beating any longer when I crouched at his side in an effort to help him. The ambulance that came for him some twenty minutes after my telephone call, took him off to the morgue. The young intern in charge said that Pete had undoubtedly died of a heart attack caused by shock. Two thousand bucks had been too hard to take. . . .

THE story of old Pete's death was as sure-fire human interest material as I'd had in my column in

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months. But in telling it, the following day, I purposely omitted any mention of little Mr. Anonymous, his desire to help people, his screwball antics in my office, or his being the guy who'd indirectly caused old Pete's death.

Ironically enough, when mentioning the benefactor who'd dropped the wad in Pete's hat, I called him merely "an anonymous philanthropist," and let it go at that. I really didn't know anything more about him, and I could see no point in clouding up natural copy with material which was slightly implausible—when you thought about it—and which would have divided reader sympathy for Pete.

But I confidently expected an aftermath, if little Mr. Anonymous read my column as avidly as he claimed.

I was somewhat surprised, consequently, when I didn't hear from the little guy the afternoon my story hit the newsstands, or even on the following day. Surprised, and a little bit sore. I realized, then, that I'd been anticipating his visit, even counting on it.

Caroline, to whom I'd told the full story behind old Pete's death, had expected the same thing, another visit from Mr. Anonymous. She was in about the same state as I, when that visit didn't materialize. But there wasn't a damned thing to be done about it. I was sorry I had so thoroughly scared the little guy away.

But yesterday's copy is yesterday's cold potatoes; and I'd managed to put the little guy out of my mind by the time I'd turned out another column for the next deadline and the next dollar.

If I thought about the little guy at all, it was only when I read the several dozen fan letters that came into the office as a result of readers being stirred by the story of old Pete's death. And by that time, as I said, I'd resigned myself to the fact that I'd seen the last of Mr. Anonymous.

I was completely unprepared for my next encounter with the little guy. I'd never expected it to happen where and how it did—namely, in my own neighborhood, a quiet little residential district on the North Side.

It was around seven o'clock, and I'd left the elevated and had walked three of the four blocks to my house. It was a nice spring evening, and the sun was still shining, and the kids filled the streets, playing ball, roller skate hockey, sky-blue, tag, and the hundred and one kid games that comprise their world.

Some of them shouted to me, and I waved back and grinned and felt like a million bucks to be known to such important guys. I'd seen so many of them growing from the time they were perambulator cases that I felt a foolish personal responsibility for all of them.

Consequently I got a sharp pang somewhere inside the avoirdupois that passes for my breast when I rounded the corner of the street in which most of the kids were playing, and saw little Ted Kelling sitting all by himself on the curb of a quiet side street.

The Kellings had lived in the neighborhood as long as I could remember. They were the neighborhood charity problem, thanks to Jack Kelling, the worthless father of the family who had always managed to dodge any work and find any available liquor. Mrs. Kelling, a kindly, long-suffering soul, took in washing, worked watching kids when other neighbors went out of an evening, did charwoman's chores at the church, and managed to keep her little family of four kids going in spite of her husband.

Little Ted Kelling was the oldest

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boy. He was around eight, I guess, getting to the stage where he could pitch in and help support the family. I felt pretty bad, seeing him sitting there alone, away from the other kids, scuffing his shoes in the gutter and looking intently at a speck on the curb edge.

I STOPPED and said: "Hi, there, Ted. What you doing here—contemplating?"

He grinned as best he could.

"Yeah, I guess so, Mr. Talbot. Guess that's what I'm doing."

I wasn't kidded. "Something's wrong, isn't it?" I asked.

The kid hesitated. I noticed that his eyes were watery, and that he was having trouble keeping the tears from flowing.

"I—I—awww, lost my money," he said.

I raised my eyebrows. "No, really? Gosh, that's tough luck."

"I'd saved it from my odd jobs. Mom wouldn't let me give it into the house fund. She said she wanted me to save a little outta what I earned so I'd get something for myself that I wanted real bad. I saved enough for that wonderful second-hand bike down at Grazer's butcher shop. Nine dollars and forty-five cents. I was gonna buy it today. This morning, when I got up, I'd lost it. I dunno what happened to it."

I was suddenly boiling mad. When he got up, eh? I knew, then, that he was covering up for his no-good old man. Old Jack Kelling had swiped the kid's dough from wherever he'd hidden it. I knew now where old man Kelling had gotten the dough I'd seen him blowing in the neighborhood bar on my way home. The money his kid had earned and saved for a bike!

I fluffed his hair with my hand. I couldn't say anything at that point, I was too damned mad.

"Maybe you'll find it, Ted. Buck up."

He nodded and turned his head a little. The first of his tears had escaped, and he didn't want me to see it.

"Sure," he said. "Sure. I guess so, Mr. Talbot. Oney, I'd thought so long about riding out there in the street on it, in front of all the other kids. It was such a beautiful bike."

"You wait," I mumbled vaguely. "Maybe the money will turn up."

I left him then, filled with a string of firecracker profanity which I'd like to have cut loose with on his father, but which had to boil inside me without a chance for outlet.

It was clear that Ted had looked on the day he got his bike as the day he'd make his debut in playing with the other kids. It was clear why he'd never really been one of the others; he'd undoubtedly felt unequal to them without the everyday toys and knick-nacks they possessed.

If I hadn't known for a fact that his proud mother wouldn't let any of the children take money from the neighbors unless they'd worked for it, I'd have taken the kid down to the drug-store and cashed a small check to repay him. Now I was thinking about some way I could fix things subtly in the next few days.

I was pretty explosive at the dinner table, telling the long suffering spouse about little Ted. She nodded, and said the same thing I did about trying to figure out a polite way to give the kid dough for his bike.

Dinner was over and I was having a cigar and a Scotch in the living room, listening to the news broadcast, when I heard my wife call from the front porch.

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"Fred, oh, Fred, come here, quickly!"

I came there with a minimum of haste. She was standing on the porch steps, pointing excitedly down the street.

"Look," she said, lowering her voice. "Look at that. Ted Kelling has his bike!"

I followed her pointing finger. Down at the end of the block, zooming around in proud circles for all to see, was little Ted Kelling, on a bicycle.

"Well, I'm damned," I said. "That's fine!"

"Look," said my helping hand, "he's already got an appreciative audience."

She was pointing now to someone standing on the sidewalk in the shade of a big elm. The someone was watching Ted delightedly and clapping his hands together enthusiastically while the kid wheeled and rode no hands, and made figure eights.

The someone was a little guy with the face of an elf. A little guy in a too-large blue serge suit. A little guy with a celluloid collar.

Little Mr. Anonymous—the do-gooder!

"Fred," my wife demanded, "where are you going?"

I was starting down the porch steps.

"I'm going to talk to Ted's audience," I said.

I WAS halfway down the block when Ted, on his bicycle, caught sight of me. He yelled joyously.

"Heeey, Mr. Talbot! Look! Look what I got!"

Which, of course, tipped Mr. Anonymous off to my approach. I saw him stop clapping, turn, stare open-mouthed at me for half a second, then take off in a stumbling run in the opposite direction.

I cursed under my breath. The night was hot, and even though little Anonymous wasn't a track star, I had a certain amount of unwieldy girth to handicap me in any race with him. He was out of sight by the time I reached Ted.

"Hey, look, Mr. Talbot," he said. "No hands!"

He rode no-hands in a wide circle, then said:

"This swell man just gave it to me. He said I won it in a newspaper contest for answering the right question. He asked me who was in command of the Fourteenth Air Force, in China, and I knew. Hê—" and then Ted completed his circle and realized that little Mr. Anonymous was no longer with us.

"Gee, he's gone!" he exclaimed.

"Sure," I said. "Probably to ask more questions. That's a fine prize, Ted," I added. "See, everything worked out just fine, didn't it?"

"It sure did, Mr. Talbot," he said. "Now I'm gonna ride down to the next block and show the other kids."

I watched him straighten out his circles and start off down the block. On my way back to the house I was thinking hard, trying to figure out how little Anonymous had known that he'd have to do his good turn with Ted in such a tactfully neat bit of lying about contests. In fact, how had he found out that the kid was in need of a good turn?

I was going up the porch when I heard the horrible blasting of a horn, the scream of brakes, and the heart-rending cry of agony from a small boy's throat. The dread cacaphony of sound came from the corner.

Something turned over inside, and instinctively I shuddered. Then I was going down the steps and running toward the corner. I could hear voices.

"It's little Ted Kelling. Oh, my God! How awful! That truck! He

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blew his horn but it was too late!"

When I got to the corner I saw the twisted frame of the bike lying against the curb where the impact of the truck had tossed it. There was a small crowd around the spot on the lawn to which little Ted had been carried. I heard someone say:

"He's dead!"

THERE was nothing about the tragedy of little Ted Kelling's death in my column when I'd finally sweated it through the following day. It would have been too much for a follow-up so shortly after the irony yarn concerning old Pete. Too, I didn't have the heart to make market value of something so close to home.

But I wasn't passing off Mr. Anonymous this time, nor was I forgetting that Ted's death chalked up number two on the little man's help-parade.

I talked it over with Caroline, when I got down to work in the morning, and had told her the story. She agreed with me that it would be more than a damned good idea to find Mr. Anonymous just as quickly as possible.

"Something's wrong, really wrong," Caroline shuddered. "That little man has something about him that's—" she trailed off, made a face. "I don't know how to say it," she groped lamely. "Old Pete's death could have been one of those once-in-a-million ironies, but the boy—"

I nodded. "I know what you mean," I agreed. "It's crazy for us to figure that way, I suppose. I never saw a little guy who seemed so utterly harmless. Yet, I dunno. I have to find him. I want to talk to him. I've got a lot of questions I want answered. Such as where did he get all the dough he dropped into old Pete's hat. He's a seedy little fellow, and scarcely the sort to be running around with that kind of wad, even as a lifetime's savings."

"But how'll you go about finding him?" Caroline asked quite reasonably.

I had to shrug that one off.

"I'll find him," I said, "somehow. I don't know how, but I'll do it."

It was around four-thirty, half an hour after I'd finished my column. I was sitting with my feet on the desk and my mind in gray clouds, thinking about ways and means of locating Mr. Anonymous, when Caroline poked her head through the door.

"If this sounds crazy," she said, "tell me."

"I'll tell you," I promised.

"Why not run an advertisement for Mr. Anonymous in the personal column?"

"Why, that's preposter—" I began. Then I said, "Why—why on earth not?"

I didn't waste any time. I took the elevator three floors up to our Want Ad department. Jerry Ulric, the department manager, saw me coming in the door.

"You're out of your element, aren't you, Fred?" he grinned. "What'd you darken these doors for? Want to run an ad?"

"Bright boy," I said. "Very bright. We ought to have your mind in the editorial department."

"Don't tell me," he said. "Let me guess. Lost and Found, that's it. You want to advertise for all the readers you've been losing."

"You're a riot," I said flatly. "Maybe you ought to be in our comic features section. Look, may I state my business?"

"Okay," Jerry grinned. "Be a sourpuss. What can we do for you?"

"I want an ad for the personal column," I said, "designed to find, or

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locate, a peculiar looking little duck whose name I don't know."

"What's he look like?" Jerry demanded, grabbing a scratch pad and pencil.

I described little Mr. Anonymous.

But Jerry had taken only several details. When I'd finished, he wasn't writing at all; he was staring at me open mouthed.

"You're kidding?" he demanded.

"Hell no. What's wrong?"

"That little guy you described was in here this morning," Jerry said excitedly. "He placed one of the most peculiar ads we've ever taken. I think he's nuts."

It was my turn to say, "Are you kidding?"

Jerry shook his head. "Uh-uh. Wait a minute. I'll find a copy of the ad he's running for tomorrow."

I WAITED while Jerry went after the ad. When he returned, he shoved it under my nose. I picked it up gingerly, not knowing what to expect. And even at that, I was almost knocked into a backflip when I began to read.

Are you unhappy? Are you the victim of injustice? Are you poor? Does ill health, marital unhappiness, or any other misfortune plague you? Find happiness—in any form you desire. I will help you. I am seeking only the gain of knowing I've helped. For further details write Box H789, this paper.

I put the slip of paper back on the counter and stared at Jerry unbelievingly.

"You mean he gave you this to run?"

Jerry nodded. "Paid cash, from a bulging wallet. Said there might be more and larger ads if this didn't bring enough replies."

"He didn't give a name, of course?" I demanded.

Jerry shook his head. "Uh-uh. Damned funny about it, too. Said names weren't important."

"This ad will run tomorrow morning?" I demanded.

Jerry nodded.

"And he'll have to come in to pick up his replies, eh?"

Jerry nodded again. "And from the looks of it he'll be in early the following day, bursting with impatience."

"That's what I think," I said. "Thanks a lot, chum. Skip my ad. I'll be in here the day after tomorrow, early, to find my man."

When I got down to the office again and told Caroline what'd developed, she was as excited as I was, and twice as triumphant, since it had been her idea and it had panned out so beautifully.

"All we've got to do now," I said, "is wait. A mere matter of less than forty-eight hours."

"And then you'll be talking to little Mr. Anonymous," said Caroline.

"Right."

"And then what?"

"Huh?"

"And then what?" she repeated with maddening feminine insistence.

"Why—uh—and then I'll know," I said.

"Know what?"

"Who he is, what his help-everybody scheme is motivated by. Why he botches it up every time," I said.

"Supposing," said Caroline, "he tells you to go to hell and refuses to tell you?"

"Why—uh—he can't."

"Why not? What can you threaten him with? What has he done? Just tried to play Santa to two people. The

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fact that the people were killed as a result of his kindness can't be blamed on him, not legally, anyway," Caroline said.

I glared at her. "Stop talking like an idiot," I said. "You're just trying to nettle me."

But whether she had tried to or not, my composure was nil by the time I put on my hat and started for home that evening. Less than forty-eight hours suddenly seemed to be an awfully long time to me. I was sore, now, that I hadn't found some way to collar Mr. Anonymous that afternoon, and half-heartedly I toyed with wild schemes to venture out in a search for him that evening. But I wasn't in the mood for sifting haystacks for needles, and I managed to get what was left of my composure into a stupor that permitted sleep.

AT THE office, next morning, Caroline looked as though she'd slept as well—as poorly, I should say—as I had the previous night. The reason for her restlessness was, of course, the same as mine.

"Darn that little guy!" was her first sentence as I entered the office.

"Those, more politely expressed, are precisely my own sentiments," I agreed. "But buck up, kid, we haven't much longer to wait."

"Another day," wailed Caroline, "is a long time."

And it did seem like one hell of a long time, each of the first four morning hours passing like a day in itself. When it came time for lunch I was very much in the mood to soothe my jangled nerves by drinking it. Trumbo's Tavern was the logical place for me to take myself for this sort of repast—which I did.

I got a stool at the far end of the bar and ordered a Tom Collins and a liverwurst on rye.

I was moodily sipping my drink and waiting for the sandwich when the dispute began. It wasn't exactly a dispute. It started as a one man harangue. A huge fellow, looking like an unemployed bouncer or an ex-wrestler, several stools down, raised a deep, harsh voice in anger.

"Yuh're sitting right where I was sitting, fella. Git outta my seat!"

The gargantuan owner of the harsh voice was a trifle drunk. I didn't catch a glimpse of the person to whom he'd been speaking until a moment later, when a thin voice muttered an inaudible reply.

"To hell wit yere apologies. Git outta my seat!"

The mammoth drunk's second command was louder than the first. And the person to who it was addressed, a small, slight-shouldered, mild-mannered, middle-aged business man with glasses and pink cheeks that were rapidly crimsoning in embarrassment, slid from his barstool and said something once more, which was again inaudible. It was, however, even from where I sat, a polite reply.

The next bit of action happened rapidly.

The big drunk grabbed the mild-mannered guy by the collar of his well-pressed gray flannel suitcoat.

"Wise, eh, punk?" he bellowed.

I heard the middle-aged chap's reply this time. It was loud, and indignant, and pathetically embarrassed-but-dignified.

"Take your hands off me!"

"Oh," bellowed the huge drunk. "Wanna start something, hey?"

The big drunk slapped the other man across the face with a beefy paw, the sound of the blow sounding like a gun blast in the sudden silence of the tavern. The slap knocked off the

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smaller man's glasses, and there was a tinkling as they broke on the floor.

"Damn you!" the mild-mannered gent cried, tears of rage and humiliation in his voice.

"Ahhhh!" snarled the big drunk. He pulled a haymaker out of nowhere and let it chop up smashingly against the side of the other's jaw.

The smaller fellow slid a good six yards from the impact of the blow, and ended up on his back beside one of the corner booths. He was out cold, an inert heap.

And at that instant a startled face—a very familiar face—poked out around the edge of the booth. It was wild-eyed, indignant, tearfully sympathtic.

Little Mr. Anonymous!

LITTLE Mr. Anonymous had been drinking a glass of milk and munching a sandwich. He put down the glass, but his mouth was still full of sandwich as he slipped quickly out of the booth and dropped to his knees beside the stricken victim of the bully.

I couldn't imagine what Anonymous was doing. I saw he was bending close and whispering into the unconscious chap's ear, and at the same time running his hand gently over the fallen gladiator's forehead, but what it all meant, I had no idea.

And at that instant the fellow on the floor opened his eyes, shook his head as if clearing cobwebs from it, and scrambled to his feet under his own power.

Less than a minute had elapsed since he'd taken the terrific punch from the big drunk—it had all happened that quickly. But now the guy was up again, with a very strange expression on his face, moving in on the hulking inebriate, fists raised to do battle.

The drunk cursed in amazement as he saw the smaller man rise, then broke into profane elation as he saw the fellow coming in to do further battle.

The hulking drunk started a punch from his heels.

The smaller man sidestepped and, as he wove back inside the punch, sent an astonishingly well-delivered left hook driving sharply into the bully's ribs.

The big drunk grunted, started to lose his footing. The smaller fellow crossed with a right to the jaw, timed magnificently, and the drunk toppled backward like a felled oak.

There was a sudden shocked silence in the place. The babble and bedlam that had accompanied the weird, but brief battle stilled abruptly at the unexpected sight of the behemoth toppling.

Then there was a wild, incredulous gasp from all throats, instantly followed by spontaneous shouts and cheering.

The middle-aged business man stood there over the inert form of his gargantuan assailant in stupefied shock.

It was then that the tavern bouncer stepped in— right on time, as always—and began to kick the downed drunk in the ribs. Thus making sure that the big drunk was beyond further resistance, the bouncer bent to drag the fellow's hulking mass from the premises.

He straightened up an instant later, his face white.

"Just a minute!" the bouncer gasped. "Just a minute. Somebody call the cops! This guy ain't out cold. He hit his head on the bar rail in his fall. The back of his head is a mess. His skull is crushed. I—I think he's dead!"

There was a sudden sharp sob of anguish to break the shocked silence that followed the bouncer's pronounce-

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ment. The sob came from the horrified, middle-aged, mild-mannered man who'd felled the bully.

"My God," he gasped. "I've killed a man!"

IN THE bedlam that followed I was able to move quickly in my exit from the place I had to move very quickly to keep within catching-distance of the rapidly departing figure of Mr. Anonymous.

I was less than fifty feet behind him when we hit the street. And in a block, although he had broken into a walk that was almost a run, I'd gained ground until I was less than twenty feet behind him.

He turned a corner, not looking back. I followed him, gaining another few feet. At the middle of the block he turned abruptly into an alley. I ran, then, to the alley. There was no sign of him. And then I saw the shivering figure frozen in the shadow of a telephone pole behind a loading platform.

I stepped into the alley casually, knowing that he'd be holding his breath in the hope that I'd pass him without detecting him. At the telephone pole I turned quickly, stepped into the shadow, and got my hands buried firmly in a death-grip on that oversized black serge suit.

"Okay, Mr. Anonymous," I said. "You're going to come along with me. We're going to have a nice long talk together, and this time you aren't going to run away."

His long, kind sad-elf face regarded me almost tearfully a moment. Then he said:

"Yes, Mr. Talbot. I guess it would be best."

QUITE firmly, I turned the key in the door of my office, tossed my hat on my desk, and turned on little Mr. Anonymous.

"Okay, get comfortable if you want to."

He took a seat on the edge of a straight backed chair against the wall. He held his hat in his hands, nervously cartwheeling it around in his lap.

I sat down on the edge of my desk, and in my best inquisitioner voice, pointed a big finger at him and barked:

"Who the hell are you?"

Mr. Anonymous shifted uncomfortably. He shot a wildly futile glance at the door, centered his gaze on a spot in the ceiling, and answered my question without meeting my stare.

"I—I'm sorry, I cannot say," little Anonymous said hesitantly. "And anyway it—uh—doesn't make any difference."

I let that pass, figuring to work on it later.

"Why did you get the idea that you'd play helping hand to old Pete, and young Tom Kelling, and that poor guy in the saloon today?" I demanded.

"I—uh—just want to help people. Really do. Honestly, Mr. Talbot. I want so very desperately to help people."

"Sure," I said bitterly. "You really want to help. So you give two grand to old Pete, and the shock kills him. Going on your helpful little way, you give Ted Kelling a bike, and the kid is crushed under a truck less than twenty minutes later. You haven't done enough for people, so you give the victim of a bully some crazy sort of ooomph that enables him to knock his tormentor cold—so cold he's dead and the guy you helped faces a manslaughter rap."

Mr. Anonymous squirmed under my verbal assault, looking as if he was about to burst into tears at any moment.

"Those—those were horrible accidents," he said faintly. "I couldn't help their happening. Believe me, I

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couldn't. They were just—just coincidental. Tragic coincidences."

"I'd like to believe that," I said. "Once was ironic, twice was coincidental, three times was something else again."

"No!" little Anonymous wailed. "No! You're wrong!"

I suddenly switched tracks in the questioning.

"Where'd you get the two grand you gave to old Pete?"

Mr. Anonymous looked perplexed. "Where did I get it?"

"Yeah," I said brutally. "You don't look like someone who had a grand in the bank, let alone two thousand to give away."

"Why—why," Anonymous said flusteredly, "uh—why I just had it, that's all. And I've much more. All I'll need, in fact, no matter how much I'll need, I'll have enough."

"Ah," I said, heavily sarcastic, "an incognito billionaire, eh?"

Mr. Anonymous blushed furiously, but said nothing.

"Maybe you'd like to tell me what the idea behind the advertisement you're running in today's personal column is, eh?"

He looked suddenly startled. "My advertisement?"

"Yeah," I said. "I know all about it, so relax. I stumbled on it yesterday afternoon, before it was even set up in type. What's the gag? What sort of a mail order racket are you starting?"

Mr. Anonymous looked sincerely bewildered.

"I don't understand what you mean," he said. "But your tone implies that you do not approve of my advertisement."

"Bright boy," I said. "You figured it out quickly. Now, let's have the rest. What's it all about?"

MY LITTLE chum took his time answering this one. He glanced at me uneasily, shuffled his feet, looked at his nails, cleared his throat.

"It is going to result in turning out mass-help to all who need it," he said slowly. "It is my plan to read the letters I get in reply to the advertisement most carefully. There should be hundreds of them. Then, when I have seeded them, so to speak, and decided on those that are sincere and really in need of help I will hold my gathering."

"Gathering?" I asked.

Mr. Anonymous nodded. "I will invite those hundreds of troubled souls to attend a mass meeting in a large hall, say a theater. There, with them all at hand, I will dispense aid and comfort to those who need it."

I nodded. It was beginning to grow clearer and clearer. I wondered why I hadn't thought of it before. Mr. Anonymous was as nutty as an almond bar. Very carefully, I let my voice change to something more sympathetic.

"I see," I said. "Much smarter than going out and looking for people too. Much more efficient, too. Just let them come to you."

His face lit up like a lighthouse beacon.

"Do you really think so?" he begged eagerly. "Do you really agree with me?"

"Certainly I do," I said. "I think you've really got something there. It's too bad I can't help you. I'd really like to."

Mr. Anonymous almost fell out of his chair in delight.

"Would you? really?"

"I surely would, only, I guess you wouldn't want me to."

"But I would!" cried little Anonymous excitedly. "I do so wish you'd help!"

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Now the really subtle dip to my angle entered. I tried not to overplay it. I didn't want him to get suspicious or frightened.

"No," I said sadly. "You're just saying that. You really don't want or need me. If you did, you wouldn't insist in keeping me so much in the dark about everything."

Mr. Anonymous considered this. He bit his underlip reflectively, indecisively. I prodded him gently.

"I couldn't help, not knowing anything," I sighed.

Mr. Anonymous looked plainly distraught.

"But I shouldn't tell," he muttered, half to himself. "I swore it wouldn't be wise to tell. I swore to keep it a secret. They'd be furious if my secret got out and word got back to them about what I was doing. Oh, my."

"Who'd be sore?" I asked sympathetically.

"All of them," Mr. Anonymous said automatically, "back there. They don't know I'm gone. They had no idea what I've planned to do. I—I left an assistant to take care of my work in my absence. They'd be furious if they found out. And if I told anybody, they might find out."

I didn't have to do much guessing to figure out that "they" were undoubtedly the proprietors of the nut house from which Mr. Anonymous had escaped. But I played along, trying to get him to babble more.

"So they don't know you're gone, eh?"

He nodded soberly. "No, they don't. At least I don't imagine they know. They'd be hardly likely to notice my absence, inasmuch as I left an assistant to carry on."

"How long," I asked solemnly, "do you intend to stay away? I mean, does this go on forever?"

MR. ANONYMOUS frowned. "Not for long," he said. "Not for very much longer, in fact. You see, I just had to do this. I just had to come here to help people. I had grown so despondent with what I was doing, that the only self-redemption I could think of was coming here to help. I guess you'd call it a sort of combination vacation and spiritual refreshment.

"I see," I told him gently. "I see exactly what you mean. Only, there's one thing you haven't told me yet."

"No?" said Anonymous. "What's that?" Then he put his hands to his mouth, like the monkey speak-no-evil. "Oh, goodness, I've told you almost everything—and I didn't intend to at all. Oh, my!"

"Sure," I said quickly. "You've told me practically everything except who you are. Come now, you might as well tell me that."

Mr. Anonymous looked at me with pleading eyes.

"You promise to keep my secret?"

"Cross my heart," I said, "and hope to die."

He took a deep shuddering breath. Then he got up from his chair, stepped to the door, listened a moment to make certain that there were no eavesdroppers. Then he tiptoed over to my desk, leaned forward and whispered dramatically in my ear.

I had expected practically anything but what he told me.

"Huh?" I said.

He whispered it once more.

"Now you see why I didn't want to tell?" he asked, stepping back.

I blinked at him solemnly.

"Sure," I said slowly. "Now I understand. But don't worry. I'm not going to tell a soul."

"You understand why I wanted to come here to do good, why it's so important that I do?"

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I nodded. "Most natural thing in the world," I said.

"I was getting so terribly blue, so dreadfully despondent with what I was doing," he said. "I just couldn't go on any longer until I'd had this—this—"

"Fling," I said.

"Yes. This fling. But I can't stay much longer. My assistant will arrange to bring me back when I wish to leave. But if I can hold my great mass-meeting, I'll be able to leave feeling that I've completed my job handsomely."

"Sure," I said. "Sure. Just a minute, though. I want to make a telephone call. I just remembered it."

I went to the door, unlocked it, locked it noiselessly once I was on the other side. Caroline sat at her desk looking as curious as a thousand cats.

"Well?" she whispered.

"You've no idea, baby, what a loony we've got in there," I said. "Let me get on that telephone. I'm calling for a buggy bus from the nut clinic right now."

"He's really that bad?" Caroline gasped.

I nodded, picking up the telephone.

"Take a look through the keyhole," I said. "See if he's staying put."

I dialed the number. Caroline, at the keyhole, looked up.

"He's all right. He's walking around. He's smelling the fresh flowers I put on your desk this morning."

I nodded. "Fine. Anything to keep him from straying."

MY NUMBER answered then, and Caroline left the keyhole to hang over my shoulder as I talked to the people from the psychopathic ward in the County Hospital. I explained things precisely and to the point.

"I wish you'd send a loony wagon over to the *Record-Times* building, right away," I told them. "We've a dipsy-doodle in room 1334, Fred Talbot's office, who needs a strait-jacket, but bad. Huh? How should I know? All I know is that he's a nut, and probably very dangerous. No. This isn't a gag. Yes, you can call me back at this number to verify it. All right, call me through the paper's number. They'll connect you with me."

I hung up, waited half a minute, maybe a little longer, and my telephone rang. It was the psychopathic ward, checking.

"Okay," I said. "Yes, I'm Fred Talbot. I placed the call. It's not a gag. Hurry over with your crazy cart. This boob might get very impatient."

I hung up, looked at Caroline. Her eyes shone with excitement.

"Gee," she gasped, "do you really think he's dangerous?"

"No," I admitted. "But he needs to be put under observation. Besides, the way he's been helping people, accidental or not, hasn't been a boon to public safety."

"Maybe you'd better go back in there and keep him calmed down," she suggested.

"Yeah," I admitted, "it might be smart."

I unlocked the office door, stepped inside.

"Well, got my business call through. Sorry to have kept you wai—"

I didn't finish my sentence. I'd been talking to an empty room. Little Mr. Anonymous was gone!

And then I saw the open window. The flapping curtains called it to my attention. There was a fire escape right outside that window. The window hadn't been open when I'd left the room. Mr. Anonymous had undoubtedly used it for his exit. The reason was undoubtedly that he'd overheard, or listened in on, my conversation with the nut people.

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"Caroline!" I yelped. "He's flown the coop!"

She came rushing into the office, looked wildly around.

"Oh, goodness, how awful," she wailed.

But I wasn't paying any attention to her, at the moment. My attenion was claimed completely by a vase of flowers on my desk.

"Did you say you put fresh flowers in that vase this morning, Caroline?" I demanded..

She looked at me in perplexity. "Of course I did, but what has that got to do with—"

"Look at those flowers," I said.

She looked at the flowers, gasped.

"You said little Anonymous was smelling the flowers, admiring them, didn't you?"

"Why—why yes. Of course he was. And they were still fresh then, just a few minutes ago. Those aren't the same flowers," she wailed. "The flowers I put in the vase, the flowers Mr. Anonymous was admiring a few minutes ago, were fresh and lovely. Those in the vase now are dead and withered!"

"Yeah," I said flatly. "Yeah, they certainly are."

I SPENT the next half hour pacing up and down like a caged panther, wearing out my office rug and pulling at my none too plentiful gray hair. It took me all that time, plus about five minutes more, to figure out something that might enable me to pick up little Mr. Anon's trail again.

And then I cursed myself roundly for having taken so long, and wasted so much time, in thinking of it. I almost broke an ankle leaping to the telephone. I got Jerry Ulric, of the want ad department, on the wire.

"Listen," I said, "this is Fred Talbot. Do answers sometimes come in on your ads the very same day they appear?"

"Sure, Fred."

"Mail, as well as telephone?"

"Very often, in an unusual ad. That supposes, of course, the letters were mailed early on reading the paper, written immediately, and mailed right here in the downtown district. Incidentally, I'll bet you want to know if that crazy ad I showed you yesterday has had any answers yet."

"That's exactly what I want to know," I told him.

"Well stop worrying, then. The goofy ad pulled over a hundred answers in the first mail. Your little funny-faced friend was in here about twenty minutes ago to pick up the answers."

"Oh, God," I groaned. "That's what I was afraid of!"

"You still trying to get in touch with the screwball?" Jerry asked.

"I want to get in touch with him now more than ever," I said.

"Well, bub, I can give you some help, this time. The little guy took all the letters that had come in so far, and left ten bucks for us to give to someone to deliver any of the others that came in within the next ten or twelve hours."

"Deliver where?" I yelped. "What address did he give?"

"Some restaurant, on the near North Side," said Jerry. "I have it written down somewhere. Just a minute."

When he came back to the phone he read the address.

"Funny place for him to transact his business, eh?" Jerry observed.

"I'm beyond being surprised at anything this guy does," I said. "Thanks a lot for the info, Jerry."

"S'all right," he said. "Hope it does some good."

"Brother," I said fervently, "so do I!"

I told Caroline not to expect me back,

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and to send the booby hatch boys back to their playhouse when they arrived to pick up their loony.

"But how will I explain?" Caroline wailed.

I shrugged. "If they won't take any explanation, you go along with 'em. One nitwit's as good as the next."

I left Caroline spluttering her indignation. Outside the building I found a cab, gave the driver the address Jerry had gotten from Mr. Anonymous.

Enroute we passed the sort of store I'd been watching for. I told the cabbie to hold it for a minute, while I jumped out and ran into the place.

When I emerged I had three oblong boxes in my arms, and a fervent prayer of hope on my lips.

"Okay, chum, on to the address I gave you," I told the driver.

IT WAS a little restaurant. Half a dozen tables, little more than a dozen booths, comprised the place. I took a booth in the rear, stacked my boxes beside me, and waited for Mr. Anonymous to arrive.

Five cigarettes later, he strolled into the place. He looked out of breath, and was carrying a big envelope, apparently stuffed with papers. I saw him speak to the manager of the restaurant, and the manager nodded, brought out a scrap of paper and wrote something on it. Then little Mr. Anonymous walked over to one of the front booths and sat down.

At that point I got up, picked up my boxes, and walked over to my little chum's booth.

"Hello," I said.

Mr. Anonymous was decidedly surprised at seeing me. Surprised, discomfited, and quite a little bit burned up.

"How did you get here?" he said coldly.

"I have a friend in the want ad section," I said. "You sure made a quick exit, and a thorough one."

"I heard your telephone conversation," he said. "You certainly went to viciously deceitful measures to betray me."

"Now, just a minute," I said, sliding into the booth beside him. "Let's not be hasty. I'm sorry I did what I did. It was a mistake, and I apologize. That's one of the reasons for my being here—to try to make you realize I'm sorry and that I no longer doubt you"

"Thank you," said little Anonymous coldly. "I accept your apologies. Now will you please leave me alone?"

"You don't plan on going through with your mass meeting for help, do you?" I asked.

Anonymous glared at me. "It won't be what I expected it to be, but I'm going through with it. I have more than a hundred replies to my advertisement. I contacted over eighty of these persons who are willing to attend my meeting."

"In such a short time?"

"I can work with urgency when it is needed," he said.

"And then what?" I demanded.

"There will be other replies before the evening is old. I will contact those persons, tonight, and make arrangements for their attendance at my meeting."

"Still going to help them all, eh?"

"Yes. Even if you persist in trying to block my efforts. My meeting will be held tomorrow morning. It is none of your business where it will be held. You may try as you will, but you'll be unable to stop me, or to find out the location of my meeting. With you insistence on bedeviling me, I know I've little time in which to work. I will help these people tomorrow, and then go back."

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"Look," I said earnestly. "You want to know why I'm really here?"

He didn't say anything.

"It's because I believe what you told me in my office. Believe it now for the first time. And it's because I want to remind you of those three people you've tried to help already."

MR. ANONYMOUS looked uncomfortable.

"You bring that up to harass me. All of those instances were accidental."

"You'd like to think so," I said. "You'd like to think you weren't directly responsible for what happened to old Pete and Ted and that guy in the tavern. But down deep, you know you haven't changed, and that the very essence of what you are was what made your help to those people turn out as it did."

"No!" cried little Anonymous shrilly. "You're lying. You want me to lose faith in myself. I refuse. I'm going through with my idea."

"You worked your idea so well with your first three tries that you want to push it off on a hundred, maybe two hundred, other people tomorrow, is that it?"

"No! Tomorrow will prove that I can do as I have planned. It will prove that those first incidents were just accidents. You will see!"

"You refuse to listen to reason?" I demanded. "You insist on taking your so-called aid to several hundred innocent, hopeful persons tomorrow?"

"I refuse to listen to babble. I've had enough of your talk. Please leave —at once!"

I wiped the sweat from my brow. Reasoning, as I had feared, had failed to sway him. Now there was nothing left but my ace. I took a deep breath, then opened with its suit.

"Supposing I proved to you that I am right, that you can't escape the fact that you are what you are, even in trying to help people? Supposing I prove that no matter how much you try to help, things will always turn out in the pattern of your first three efforts? Supposing I prove that you cannot help yourself, no matter how decent your motives, and that whatever you caress is doomed?"

"You are being ridiculous!"

"But supposing I prove it?" I insisted.

"Why, I—I'd admit your premise. I would have my assistant bring me back to the place where I belong," Mr. Anonymous said slowly. "But I have told you, you cannot prove such a thing."

I jerked the string from the first oblong box, opened it, tossing the cover aside.

"Here," I said, "what do you think of these?"

Mr. Anonymous was thrown off balance.

"They, they're beautiful!" he gasped. "They're glorious!"

Instinctively, he reached forward and touched them, bending close to inhale their fragrance. They should have been everything he said they were. They were a dozen American Beauty roses, two bucks apiece.

I pushed the box aside, opened the second. Chrysanthemums, a dozen of the very finest. Ultra expensive. Mr. Anonymous gasped. He put his hand toward them.

"Hold them to your face," I said. "Take a deep whiff, they're super-special."

He didn't need a second invitation, he lifted the dozen long-stemmed beauties to his face, inhaling deeply. Then, reverently, he put them back into the box.

He looked up at me embarrassedly.

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"I have always loved beautiful things," he said. "Flowers, beautiful flowers, are among the most gorgeous things on earth."

I had opened the third box as he spoke. Lilies. A dozen of the most fragrant, luscious lilies in town. Mr. Anonymous let out an odd little moan of pleasure, reached into the box and tenderly stroked the stems of the flowers.

IT WAS just about then that he realized the oddity of my display. He had, until that moment, been so carried away by the beauty of the blossoms, that he'd forgotten the unusual and uncalled for manner in which I'd dragged them into our conversation.

"But—but really. What has this to do with me? Why did you bring these flowers here?" he demanded.

"As proof," I said, "that your caress condemns."

I picked up the first box. The one with the roses. I held it out to him.

"Look," I said. "Dead, dried, horribly withered weeds. A few moments ago these were beautiful roses. But that was before you touched them."

He didn't have time to catch his breath before I picked up the second box. Its contents, once the lovely chrysanthemums, were but ragged, withered weeds.

"You embraced these," I said flatly. "Look at them now. Dead!"

"But—" Mr. Anonymous blurted desperately. I cut him off, picking up the last box, the one that had contained the lilies.

"Look at these. Brown, stricken, their beauty obliterated by death. You caressed their stems. Now will you believe me?"

He looked at me wordlessly. Anguish was on his face, pain in his eyes.

"I—I," he faltered, "I killed them?"

"Just as surely as you killed old Pete and Ted and the bully in the tavern and the future of the man you helped there."

Mr. Anonymous shook his head in bewildered dismay.

"Not because you wanted to," I said softly. "Your intentions were a million miles in the opposite direction. But you could not avoid the fact that you are what you are. What you are, killed all of them."

Mr. Anonymous rose. He extended his hand. I shook it.

"You win," he said. "I—I'll not risk my—ah—aid to the others. I believe you. I should never have started this thing. But I—I did so want to—" He faltered as his voice broke.

"I know what you mean," I said. "You thought you could change roles, for just a little while. But you couldn't."

Mr. Anonymous smiled a game, trembling little sad-elf smile. He picked up his hat.

"I—I guess I'll be getting back," he said.

I walked with him to the door.

"Your assistant will call for you?" I asked.

He nodded.

We were in the street.

"Goodbye," he said. "I'm glad you did what you did."

"That's all right," I said. "I'm sorry I didn't believe you."

Mr. Anonymous moved away, stepped down the curb and into the street. He looked back over his shoulder and waved briefly to me, that dead game, sad-elf smile still on his face.

The truck careened around the corner just as little Anonymous reached the middle of the street. There wasn't a chance in the world of its missing him. His assistant had done a punctual job of calling for him. There was a shriek of brakes, and little Mr. Anonymous

(Concluded on page 139)

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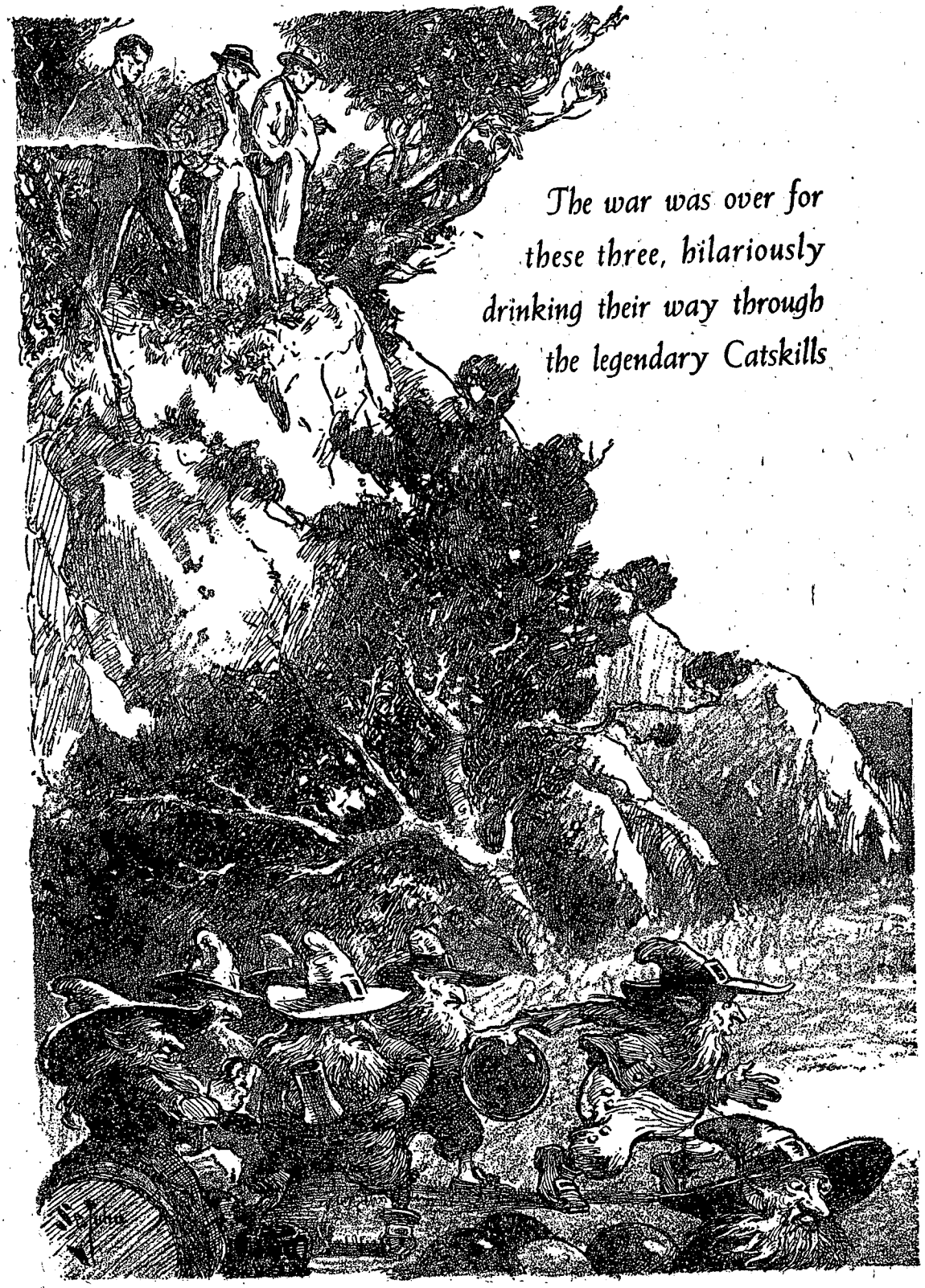

The war was over for these three, hilariously drinking their way through the legendary Catskills

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WINK VAN RIPPLE

BY GEOFF ST. REYNARD

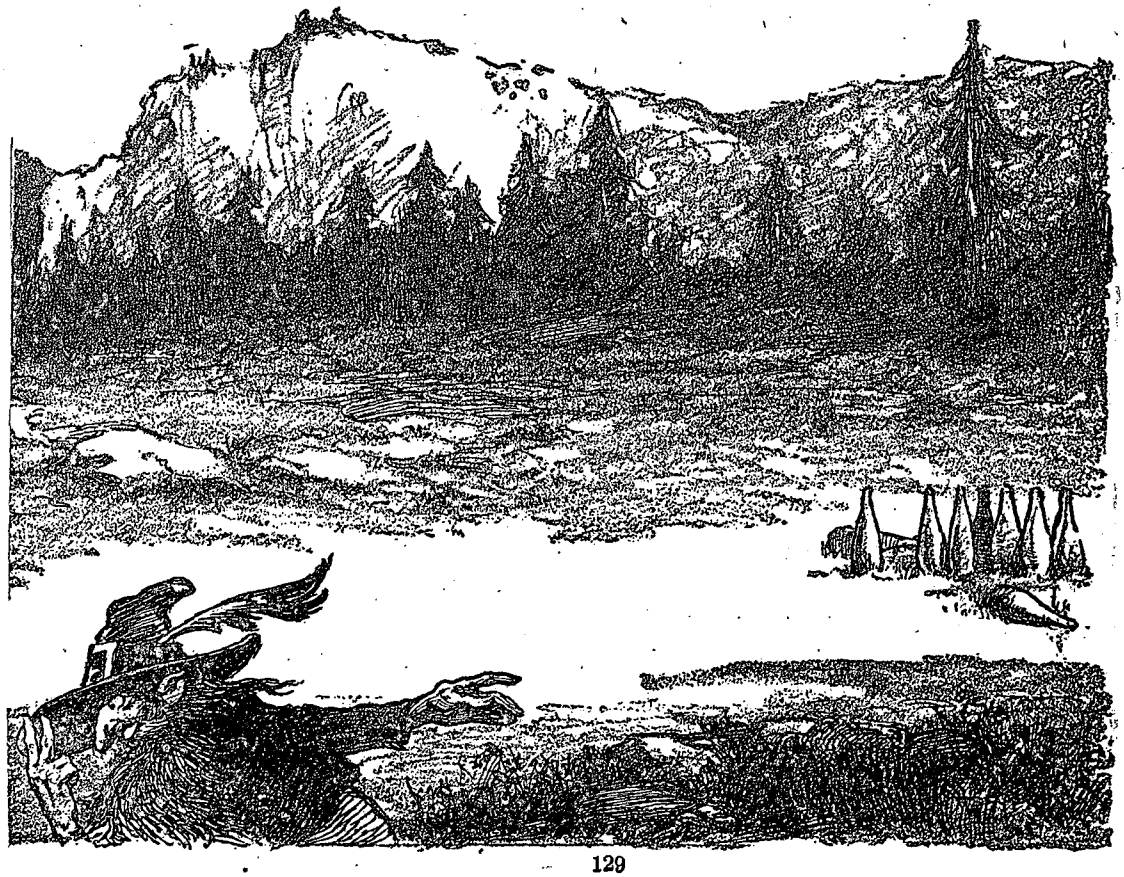
PLUMP, flaccid Hiyuh Jackson Priestley slumped unhappily against the solid yellow wall of The Bubble of Joy, his heedless hands doing things to his jacket pockets which would have given his tailor convulsions.

Hiyuh Jackson, whose right name is lost forever in the mists of antiquity, had the soft inquiring face of a newly-born baby girl. He also possessed the soft inquiring fingers of an infant octopus, and the soft not-so-inquiring mind of a three-toed sloth. Marring the child-like expression of the round face were seventeen hairs under a blob of a nose. These were always referred to as My Moustache, or more justly as The Caterpillar, the choice of phrase depending on who spoke of it. It was surprising how many people did not.

The eyes of Hiyuh Jackson were pale and moist, shallow pools of faded blue rainwater. By no stretch of the imagination could they have been considered beautiful.

In sharp contrast, however, to Hiyuh Jackson's personal lack of glamour, his clothes stood out with the blatancy of ketchup on a tablecloth. Had the sound

The sound of kegeling rang through the glen



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of a bagpipe and the voice of a foghorn mated, and had the result of their union become visible, Hiyuh Jackson's tailor would have made him a sport coat out of it.

We have gazed too long on Hiyuh Jackson; let us retire into the Bubble of Joy.

Seated alone at the third table on the left as one entered was a long-drawn-out young gentleman, dressed in perfectly normal male clothing, light blue tweeds to be exact, who was as conspicuous in The Bubble of Joy, as, say, Hiyuh Jackson would have been at a church supper. The denizens of this hell's hostelry were in the main of a queer genus known as zootsuiters or characters; loud is the mildest word that can be said for their apparel. . . .

The thin chap in tweeds, whose name was Curt Carter, had been methodically drenching his inner man for some time with gin concoctions, whisky amalgamations, rum jumbles, blends of all three, champagne, brandy, beer, Scotch and goat's milk. He had begun the day before yesterday by wetting his whistle, had progressed to taking a drop too much, gone on to tippling, then by easy stages to carousing, to liquoring up, and finally to going on a full bender. He was now stinko.

While he drank, which was in reality all the time, he conversed with himself in a grumbling vicious monotone.

"Whaddinell d'Ee affta takerout lasite fr? Awhhj . . . shezuh lil hiccup whenchs, thuh tootimum—," and much more, in the same unedifying nature.

The final member of this trio of subjects was a good-looking, though indefinably sleek, y o u n g gentleman named Wink van Ripple.

Wink was that rarity on Hollywood Boulevard, an intelligent wolf.

At one time he had deserted the hard bright yellow atmosphere of California for the soothing green hills of Pennsylvania's Northfield College; there it was that Wink had acquired, above and beyond the stately gobs of learning handed out by decaying professors, the knowledge of what a couple of tall Creme de Menthe cocktails will do to a lovely's objections, of how a convertible may be parked in the space between two lights in order to utilize to the fullest extent the friendly murk of an evening, and of—quite a few other things. He had also picked up such a variety of fascinatingly useless chunks of higher-type information that his company was always entertaining, never a bore. His mind had coursed in two channels: the one, aiming toward erudition, had been filled with lore beyond the ordinary; the other, running madly after so many women, had begun to look like an enormously long piece of spaghetti. That makes a very baffling bit of allegory, but it will serve.

At any rate, Wink van Ripple was a scholar if not quite a gentleman, a genius without stability, and an uncanny combination of philosopher's brain and collegian's morals.

Wink was, in effect, an intelligent wolf.

THIS scion of the van Ripples sat quietly, his chair propped against the rear wall of the cafe, his eyes roaming the large garishly-lit room, his exquisite hands folded tenderly around a towering glass full of a half-caste drink known locally as an Edgar Allan Poe. Its base was fusel oil, diluted with 120 proof rum and a dash of Vitamin D. Wink was addicted to the nauseating mess.

The wolf was three parts drunk. He had decided some minutes before to get up and locate his friend Nasty Carter, but his nervous reactions were sluggish

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this morning and had not had time to react properly to this intention; so he sat still and made little futile twitches, creating the impression of a danseuse secretly practising some fantastic new step.

There is no telling how long this would have gone on, Wink convulsively quivering and Curt bad-temperedly drinking himself into a stupor, had not Hiyuh Jackson Priestley come ambling into The Bubble of Joy and collected both of them. Neither quite realized what was occurring until the trio were seated in Wink's scarlet and chrome convertible.

The wolf came partially to life.

"Hallo, Fat," said he affectionately, thumping the unhappy Hiyuh Jackson in the region of his lower ribs. "How's our tame slug this afternoon?"

"Solid," moaned the chubby exponent of the stuff cuff. "It's morning, though."

Curt Carter looked up sullenly. "By God, *that* alters matters," he interrupted solemnly, and retired into his monotone once more with a belligerent belch. The fastidious Wink winced.

"Nasty's intoxicated," he observed in a moral tone. The effect was ruined by an uncontrollable hiccup from the speaker in the middle of his final word.

Hiyuh Jackson looked sadly at the pair. He sighed lugubriously. "Pie-eyed and ryed to the hide," said he.

"Who's behind the wheel?" queried Wink van Ripple.

"You are."

"Let's go, then," chortled the educated wolf, and with a grim cough the lowslung auto flung itself passionately away from the curb.

"What are we drinking?" asked Wink, when the car had spun dizzily on its way for several blocks. "Ah," he answered himself, "have one of mine." "Thanks," he said gratefully, "I will."

He extracted a flask of formidable capacity from his jacket pocket and unscrewed the cap. This he flung aside, and drank deeply from the silver container. Hiyuh Jackson handed the cap back and Wink screwed it on. He lovingly replaced the flask.

"Who's driving?" he asked the circumambient air.

"Murder," groaned Mr. Priestley. "You are."

"Ah, *that* fine chap." Wink was openly admiring. "We're safe then, safe as safe can be. What a noble fellow he is," he sniffed, "one of nature's—err—nature's—well, one of 'em." He broke into a yodel.

"Ghastly in spades," lamented Hiyuh Jackson, that much-enduring man.

"More to the point," said Wink suddenly, slightly calmed by the blast of cool air in his flushed handsome face, "*where* are we going? Eh, gentlemen?"

Hiyuh Jackson had no suggestion. Nasty Carter, when approached, merely cursed foully and dropped off to sleep.

Wink whirled the convertible around and tore off in the other direction in answer to a sudden thought. The Victory Speed Limit went to an early grave.

"Pennsylvania, here I come," sang our tame wolf tunefully, almost soberly.

"Right back where—where I was a couple of years ago."

"Oh, great," choked Nasty Carter in his sleep. "Splendid."

By nightfall California could look about and mutter proudly, "See? No more of them, anyway!" The scarlet convertible had folded its top and vanished, completely, leaving no trace.

THE proprietor of Alfred's Petroleum Emporium, Red Hot Dog and Hamburger Palace, Lunch Room and Tourist Hotel—who was, amazingly, just one wizened little man—put a

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crabapple face out the door of his gas-station and scowled.

"Shut your confiddled horn off," he creaked petulantly, "I'm comin'."

The scratched and battered convertible ejected a slim rumpled fellow and an overstuffed sweating lump in blindingly gaudy garments. On the leather seat inside the car sprawled a third form, vaguely human.

"Hallo. Are you Alfred?" asked the best-looking.

"How many?" grumped the proprietor.

"One Alfred will be ample," sighed the obese one sadly.

"Oh, fill it up," answered Wink van Ripple. "Tell me, what river is that?" he gestured toward a silver-gleaming sheet of water winding behind tall trees.

"Thuh Hudson."

"What state is this?"

The wrinkled one looked up. "Go to hell."

Hiyuh Jackson, much, much the worse for his protracted stay in the convertible, sighed mournfully. "You're just beatin' your gums, boy," said he to the wolf.

The prostrate shape in the car arose slowly and peered out. "Urp," it mentioned.

The little owner of the gas station had filled the tank. Now he came and stood regarding the unsavory trio. Even Wink was not attractive. They had crossed the continent in one car and three suits (one apiece of the latter) and they looked it. They were unshaven, slightly grey around the eyes.

"Why ain't you kids in the army?" queried the small man. "I got a boy, jist your age, been in four years. Wasn't drafted, by gosh, either, enlisted. Why ain't you youngsters in?"

Wink stiffened his frame, threw out his chest about an inch. "Gentlemen, attention!" he shouted. "Why are we not in the army? I ask you!"

Nasty Carter protruded a belligerent chin.

"*I* have no liver, no kidneys, no stomach, and no heart whatsoever," he snapped. He was more sober than usual and not in notably good humor.

Hiyuh Jackson Priestly giggled inanely. "I haven't got the brains, grandfather," said he in a wet voice.

Wink van Ripple mock-saluted. "And my nerves are a mass of tortured, screaming bloody raw filaments, soaked in alcohol and rapidly disintegrating," he finished.

The three broke into song, tuneless and jarring.

"We are three jolly rejects, we are, we are, we are," they bawled.

The man spat contemptuously.

"Couldn't you get in defense work?"

They all were horrified; Wink blanched. "There's a gruesome thought, gentlemen! Work! While I have a car, Nasty has a bankroll, and Hiyuh Jackson comes along to sober us up,—ye gods, man, why slave?"

The man turned his back. "Sometimes I wonder if the country's worth savin," said he. "Guys like you in it."

He spat again. "Gimmie your coopons an' money an' get out o' here."

Carter handed over a bill.

"Where's your coopons?"

Carter looked sullenly at him. Wink came to his side.

"The man wants his coupons, Nasty," he grinned. The two bent down and dexterously lifted the little man into the air by his ankles. He struggled wildly, futilely, his face a mask of terror. The two young men allowed him to swing over and hang head down. His hat fell off.

"How's about in there?" Hiyuh Jackson came out of his coma to indicate a huge barrel of rainwater. Accepting

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the suggestion, the wolf and his friend carried the little man over and dumped him into it head first. His feet waved madly. "*In pace requiescat,*" muttered Nasty.

Wink went to the door of the station and shouted at the woman behind the candy counter.

"We're leaving you a surprise packet in the rain barrel."

The three piled into their convertible and drove off.

"Sometimes I wish," said Wink thoughtfully, as they hummed along, "that we had some gas coupons left. These scenes are very painful to a man of my intelligence and sensibilities, friends."

"Murder," sighed Hiyuh Jackson. "Simply murder."

A FEW miles down the pike they passed a pretty girl in shorts who led a cow sedately along. The brakes howled piercingly.

"Pahdon me, faih damsel," quoth the heir of the van Ripples in his sleekest tones, "but can you-all infohm me-all wheah-bouts we-all ah?" He smiled engagingly.

The girl smiled back.

"An asinine question deserves an asinine answer. You're in a red convertible and you're all drunk."

"No, no, lass," objected the wolf. His blood-shot grey eyes took in the perfectly developed figure. He silently cursed his two leechlike companions. "We really don't know. What state is it? What mountains are these? What year is it?"

She regarded him seriously. "This is New York. These are the Catskill Mountains. This is—oh, you must know that! 1943."

With a shout of thanks Wink slid the car away. He turned his head to observe as long as possible those slim brown legs, that—

WHAM!

Crash!

Crunch!

Bang . . . bang . . . bang. . . .

Tinkle. . . .

Ping.

Then silence. The wheels stopped spinning, the shattered tree rested quietly, the smashed convertible bled gasoline from every pore, and three still figures sprawled restfully, unattractively on the green slope of the mountain.

A low rumbling grumble, a guttural growling, whispered far above them. They heard it not. They heard not a damned thing. One might have said, noting them there, that after life's fitful fever they slept well.

Unfortunately, not even one of them was dead.

IT WAS not long before Wink sat up, gingerly felt his skull, and painfully rose to his feet. He wobbled a bit, but after cursory inspection nothing proved broken. His greatest grief was a long slit in the arm of his green checked coat.

The convertible, a swift glance convinced him, was irretrievable. He turned his glazed eyes to his companions.

Nasty lay sleeping peacefully among the fallen branches of the splintered tree. Hiyuh Jackson, after some shaking, awoke and bubbled, "Where am I?"

"I do love you, Hiyuh Jackson," said Wink, who was in an ill temper. "You're so original."

"Yeah. Solid." The slug-like youth was confused.

They roused Curt Carter somehow, and the three looked helplessly about them.

"Who has a drink?" It could have been any one of them who spoke. The

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thought blossomed in each mind simultaneously.

They found a flask of Edgar Allan Poe in the smashed car. It was half empty. They polished it off in several gulps apiece.

"Well? Which way, gentlemen?"

To the east lay an interminable ribbon of concrete. No living thing showed along its length. Hiyuh Jackson suggested plaintively they walk that way.

To the west, whence they had come, the girl with the cow had disappeared. Although no house or farm showed itself there either, Wink was for going in that direction.

Nasty stridently, harshly held out for sitting still and flagging passing motorists.

"You're cooking—" began Hiyuh Jackson.

"On the very front burner," finished all three in chorus. Hiyuh Jackson looked mildly surprised. "Howja guess?"

They sat down finally, irritable, half-sober, their alcohol-scarred stomachs discontented and peevish.

They waited with growing impatience for perhaps ten minutes. Then Wink stood up.

"Nothing is gonna come along and pick us up for hours yet," he said. "Don't you know it's just about noon—the time when all good defense workers are on the job, not out carousing in their autos?"

Nasty Carter cast him an evil look. "Do you want to walk?"

"I don't want to sit looking at you birds on an empty stomach," snapped Wink. "Have either of you master-brains noticed that we're squatting on the beginning of a path?"

They shook the rising mental fog from their eyes and saw that there was indeed a little pathway there, leading into the hills, disused and somewhat overgrown with grass, but a still-distinct track.

"I'm going to see where it goes," announced Wink.

He walked with staggering roll up the incline of the grassy track. The others, although they were not essentially walking men, followed him dully.

"It may lead to a farmhouse," thought Wink.

THEY soon found themselves hidden from the road, winding up a shady glen overhung with great verdant masses of trees and vines and shrubs. Wink remembered his college years, spent in surroundings not unlike this. . . . He recalled also various of the women he had strolled with in just such places. He smiled not unhappily.

Nasty Carter tripped over a vine and flung himself with abandon into a bush. The bush cursed fluently in Nasty-like tones until Hiyuh Jackson had with difficulty separated him from it, or it from him, and they floundered on to catch up to Wink. Heedless, he strode ahead, his brain clearing moment by moment as the clean air filled his lungs. Fnding that the same thing was happening to them, Hiyuh Jackson and Carter lit cigarettes to prevent it. They were much more comfortable inhaling smoke.

"Up the airy mountain, down the rushy glen," thought Wink apropos of nothing in particular, "we daren't go a-hunting—for fear of little men."

He shivered. But he would not turn back now. At a farmhouse there might be food . . . a daughter or two. . . .

The Compleat Wolf at all times.

At last even to their soaked minds penetrated the realization that a storm was brewing somewhere ahead. Low, rumbling reverberations rolled and billowed out toward their little party. No

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spatter of rain appeared, though, and they quickened their pace until they were almost running.

Minutes later Hiyuh Jackson gave a startled cry and his doughy features turned paler than ever. "My God," he puffed, "did you see it?"

They hadn't.

"Some dam' little character peeped outa them bushes at me," screamed the normally placid young man. "A li'l ickie with fuzz on his puss."

They all frankly began to run, casting pride to the winds, inexplicable terror clutching at them from just behind. "This path ought to end at a house soon," panted Wink.

Curt Carter swore breathlessly. They were miles from the highway. At last they topped a rise together and halted as one—well, *man* is scarcely the word, but will have to do.

"What a crummy-lookin' bunch of bums," said Nasty Carter with an oath.

"The dwarves, by Judas! Wonder if Snow White's around," said Wink van Ripple with a leer.

"Fairies! With chinspinach! Let's ditch these cats, but swift," said Hiyuh Jackson Priestley with a moan of horror.

The bowlers went on with their game. Against the purple-blue of the Catskills and the dark green of the forest the little men looked strangely normal, as if they belonged. And this was queer because they were on the average about three feet tall.

Wink alone of the trio realized that their gaily colored belted jerkins, their voluminous trousers with bunches of ribbons at the knees, and their multitudes of brass buttons were in the ancient Dutch style. These, with the bristling fantasies of whiskers, the long purple noses and pointed ears, the luminous eyes and squat powerful figures, forced themselves on Wink's unwilling retina and were interpreted in the excellent but warped brain behind it for what they were.

To Nasty Carter they were a bunch of repellent little gangsters who were probably making a movie here in these godforsaken wilds.

To the bewildered, frightened Hiyuh Jackson they were a crowd of supernatural (that is not the word Hiyuh Jackson used, for the simple reason that he was not acquainted with it) jerks who were off the beam, out of the well-known groove, definitely but gruesome.

To Wink they were what they were, Hendrick Hudson's spirit crew at their eternal thundering contest of nine-pins.

CONSEQUENTLY Wink knew that here in this great open glade, turfed with smooth cropped grass and enclosed by towering gaunt rocks and majestic lavender mountains, he had discovered the originals of Irving's tale . . . the perpetual bowling league, source of the thunder, Hendrick Hudson and his galloping ghouls, perhaps the very little men for fear of whom the poet dared not go a-hunting; and Wink shuddered uncontrollably, ceased for the time to think about women, and endeavored to still his rattling knees.

The first one to take any notice of the trio was a fat and jolly five-foot gentleman who had just bowled three strikes in a row. Puffing, his red face streaming, he waddled over to them. His face was constructed in balls, mounds, and circles. Fat rubber balls for cheeks, a pair of perfectly round holes for eyes, a nose that surpassed Hiyuh Jackson's in blobbishness. He was dressed like the others, but more richly, and locked to his belt was a thick iron scabbard with gold chasing. There was no sword it it.

"Velcome, chentlemen," said he in

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thick cheerful tones. "Id iss seldom ve haff visitors here in dese days." He mopped his dripping face with a flamboyant handkerchief. Hiyuh Jackson eyed it covetously.

Rumble, rrrumble, went the bowling balls along the turf; crash, boom, said the nine-pins as they scattered and fell.

The three found their voices at the same instant.

"Obscenity foulness dash," said Carter nastily.

"Murder," sighed Hiyuh Jackson.

"Hendrick Hudson, I presume?" asked Wink van Ripple. He had somewhat lost his previous trepidation and was interested, intelligently curious.

"Der ssame. Unt you?" The old commander inclined his head politely, interrogatively.

Wink introduced them in turn. They reacted typically: Nasty growling wordlessly and ignoring the proffered plump hand, Hiyuh Jackson giggling and drooling slightly, and Wink bowing from the hips.

"Came, chentlemen, ve haff a liddle trink unt den a game of nine-pins, *ja?*" He smiled in friendly fashion.

Hiyuh Jackson and Nasty came to life. "Yah!" they said, almost vigorous in their approval of the former, though perhaps dubious of the latter. Alcohol, by all means; exercise, not unless unavoidable.

"Chust vate until Diedrich mages hiss next rroll," said the ancient one, turning his broad back on them.

Nasty poked Wink in the side with an elbow.

"How'd you know this character?" he grated low.

HIYUH JACKSON stood staring into space, whistling soundlessly. His not to reason how, his but to wait for the next drink.

Wink eyed Nasty a moment. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you," he replied at last. "Just pretend I met him somewhere."

"Der Teufel!" snorted the commander excitedly. Dot's der virst dime Diedrich efer bead Peter in all dese years! Vot a celebration ve vill haff!" He gestured largely to a passing gnome. "Pring der speshial, hurry!" His accent reminded Wink of a radio comedian attempting German, although, he knew, Hudson was Dutch, a sort of Flying Hollander of the land, doomed like his compatriot Vanderdecken to an unending existence here on earth.

Up came a tall beaker of green fluid. Hendrick Hudson put back his amazing head and drained a gallant gulp. He handed it to Hiyuh Jackson.

"Wait! For God's sake, wait!" It was Wink, brain aflame, eyes likewise. "Don't drink a drop!"

Hiyuh Jackson contrived to look pained, peevish, angry, insulted, meek, and questioning. "Not make with the grog?" he mumbled.

"Do you want to sleep twenty years?" Wink was pale mauve.

Hiyuh Jackson tittered appreciatively and drank a long gollop. He wiped his mouth and passed the flagon to Nasty Carter. Wink was in ecstasies of anxiety. "My Lord, no! Don't, Nasty!"

"I assure you," came the deep serious voice of Hendrick Hudson the captain of the little men, "that none off you vill shleep for twendy yearss."

"It's aw reet, Nasty," gulped Hiyuh Jackson. "Hot stuff."

Nasty drained a mighty draft.

He passed the container to Wink.

Wink dropped it in agonized horror and turning, fled, stumbling, falling, staggering up madly and rushing on, tripping, catching his ankles in vines and creepers, shrieking insanely and neverlooking back, and at last disap-

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pearing in the trees. His panic-stricken yells came to the two young men, grew fainter, died away. *Thunder, thunder,* went the bowling balls.

"Diedrich." It was the low rumble of Hudson. "Peter, Hans. Take the flagon. He must not escape. See to it."

Orders were issued, and the fantastic little men slipped away from the bowling ground. Hudson turned to the two humans. Gone was the mock-Dutch-English he had so jollily used on them a moment before. He spoke in High Dutch, angrily, fluently, and though they did not understand, their dimmed brains quailed and drew back before his thunderous rage.

"Well, rascals," he bellowed, "you have drunk from the flagon of Hendrick Hudson. How does it feel, eh? Does it warm your bellies? Does it sooth your brains? No, it fires your guts with unquenchable flames, does it not?" He roared mirthlessly. "You poor soft-minded fools!"

The two were doubled up, hands pressed to stomachs. Forgotten stood ancient Hendrick Hudson, forgotten the gnomes gathered round.

Hendrick spoke more calmly.

"They all make the same mistake. Did you hear the other? "You will sleep a score of years." From Irving down the race has made the same error. Find the flagon of Hendrick Hudson and sleep twenty years. Rip van Winkle did!" He chuckled, in better mood now.

"Van Winkle was a lazy man. The flagon brought out his most salient point—laziness incarnate. And what will it do to these poor spawn of dismalness?"

One of his men put in a word. "Remember the one it turned into a bull."

Another, "And the one who was transformed into a cloud!"

Hendrick chuckled again. "Ja, it is a humorous old flagon, a beaker with a sense of fun. Have you noted, Chris, how it keeps abreast of the times? Modern slang, and all that?"

"Ja. The demon of the flagon is a droll devil."

"What will these two be, I wonder?"

"We shall see in a moment."

GRADUALLY the lines of Nasty Carter dimmed, blurred, ran together wetly and dwindled to a squat dusky heap. The heap sat quietly for a few seconds, a bright ill-tempered eye gleaming in its midst, then exploded with a rush and whir and flew off.

"What in the world was that?"

"Thousand devils! It was a bird."

Hendrick Hudson scratched his plump cheek reflectively. "It is what they call in English a 'grouse'," said he. "What relation would that have to a splenetic irritable churl of a fellow like our late acquaintance?"

They shook their heads.

"From the little I know of American slang," admitted Hendrick, "I rather expected a carp. Perhaps 'to grouse' signifies the same thing?"

They accepted the explanation and looked about for the other one.

Hiyuh Jackson Priestley had entirely disappeared.

"Completely vanished," murmured Hendrick a little later. "Now *that* never happened before, did it?

"Do you suppose, captain, that he was such a nonentity that he had no outstanding feature?"

"Perhaps . . . wait! Look here!"

The Dutchmen clustered around their leader. They all stood silent, regarding wonderingly a phenomenon in the atmosphere.

About eye-level, surrounded by nothing but air, a drop of pure sparkling water formed from nothingness. It pearled, hung a moment, then dropped

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to the turf and sank into it.

Another drop formed slowly, its tiny perfect surface reflecting the cerulean sky above it. It poised momentarily, then disengaged itself from its invisible support and splashed down into oblivion.

Another drop formed and repeated the process. Another. Another. Another.

Yet another. Forever, endlessly, forming and falling, drops without limit, unceasing and amaranthine, in immortal unending trickle from the infinite.

You are not surprised, nor am I. No modern American would have been. No one but a company of archaic Dutch wraiths could possibly be surprised at discovering that Hiyuh Jackson Priestley was a drip.

Wink van Ripple came out on the highway some two miles from the spot where his convertible lay wrecked. The words "came out on" are inadequate and do not give you a complete picture of his emergence from the entangling grapevines, creepers, birch, and various other obstacles that had hindered him for so long.

Because he came out of the forest at the top of a high cliff, suddenly, without warning, and shot out into space like a—a spitball springs to the mind—to land forty feet below on his well-tailored posterior.

THE two little men protruded their beards from the woods and peered about them cautiously.

"Nothing in sight," said one. Let him have it."

They raced fleetly over the rocks and down to the sprawled body of Wink van Ripple. That gentleman was unconscious. It was rapidly growing to the proportions of a habit.

One little man lifted Wink's supine head, the other forced open his lips and poured a measure of green thick stuff from a jug into his mouth. He swallowed convulsively, flickered his eyelids. They dropped his head and scuttled away into the forest. Its coolth enveloped them and once more Hendrick Hudson's ghostly crew were safe in their sanctuary. The rolling thunder sprang out sharp and challenging, dying away with a soft drum—drum—drum. Hot silence settled.

Wink van Ripple, being very careful not to shake his head, opened first one gummy eye and then the other.

Was he in bed?

His bed did not have pebbles in it.

Where in hell was he?

He was on a highway. His face was on the highway also. He lifted it painfully.

A hundred yards away stood the pretty girl in shorts. She was staring at him. She wasn't moving a muscle. He must look like the returning dead; he smiled weakly and with a great deal of effort.

He had had a wreck. Yes, that was it. He had turned to look at her and his car had socked something.

She was worth it. He took in the curves which even in his pain-wracked condition looked good to him. He spoke reassuringly, seeing the mounting tide of terror in her eyes.

"I'm okay, sister," said Wink van Ripple.

"Ooooooooww," said a low mournful voice at the same time. It drowned his words. He attempted it again.

"Don't look so scared. I'm alright. Come and—"

He stopped, the realization dawning on him that the mournful howl was issuing from his own mouth.

He looked down. He looked back over his shoulder. He stared. He whirled, pain forgotten, and inspected

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wildly every least inch of him. The girl fled, but Wink never missed her. He just sat and gazed at himself.

At last, as the sun was disappearing, he lay down again, sorrowfully, hopelessly, forlornly.

Between his great grey paws he tenderly laid his long grey muzzle, and in the grip of melancholy beyond telling, he began to sob.

MISTER ANONYMOUS

(Concluded from page 127)

went down beneath the huge wheels of the vehicle.

The crowd had gathered around the body that had housed the elf-faced little man. I didn't join the curious. I knew he would be dead. I stood there on the sidewalk, watching the confusion and trying to think straight.

A police officer came up to me, then.

"Listen, mister, that little guy is dead."

"Is he?" I asked.

"He hasn't any identification on him. But I swear you're the guy he waved to when he was crossing the street. Come now, you know his name?"

I looked at the cop blankly. I was thinking: *Sure. I know his name. He told it to me once and I didn't believe him. I believe it now though. But I won't tell you. You'd think I was getting wise, or losing my mind. You see, his name is Death.*

"Well?" the cop demanded truculently. "You know the guy, doncha? Ain't you gonna identify him?"

My answer was motivated by two factors. Once I had promised little Anonymous not to reveal his name when he told it to me. And then, I didn't want to make myself a candidate for a ride in the crazy cart.

I stared the copper right in the eye.

"I never saw the guy before in my life," I told him.

THE END

THE GADGETEER ERA

By LYNN STANDISH

A MARKEDLY superior attachment for the telephone which tells you, if you call someone who is out, at what hour he will return may be found in Europe. Another attachment permits you to dictate a message, to which the absent telephonee listens when he returns to his quarters.

Europe also has a superior traffic light, below the main green or red light, a short chain of four or five small lighted bulbs. These go out one by one, beginning at the bottom, at equal intervals while the light above is burning red or green. In this way the motorist or pedestrian arriving at an intersection can tell at a glance just how long it will be before the light changes, and whether it is safe to start across the intersection. But one never can tell how long it will be before this device will be put into general use in this country since the coming years hold many such super surprises in store for us all.

In Sweden you can call a specified number and get a weather report of the next day or so. This report is given mechanically, the sound records being changed every few hours to bring the information up to date. At present we too can get a weather report of the day by calling a specified number, however that does not include for a day or so to come.

Many night automobile accidents are caused by the glare of approaching headlights. With polaroid glass used both on the approaching car and in your own windshield, it is said that the dazzle entirely disappears. Polaroid sun glasses are quite popular but it will be sometime before such equipment will be made universal on new cars.

Thousands of Europeans, when they turn out to watch a ceremony procession, carry small portable periscopes which would be equally useful to American crowds. However, they are unknown here.

Since mechanical progress is in the sound line of American tradition, we Americans resent every such instance of devices in use in some other part of the world that are not in use here but our aim is to be on a level if not a step ahead.

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Under the slashing attack of this incredible pair, the trees melted away

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"I COULD hire men of my own," Jors Bjornsen said coldly. "But since I've got a mortgage on that little dump of a lumbering mill of yours, I'm giving you a chance to work it off."

"Don't kill yourself with generosity, Bjornsen," Jack Edwards replied drily.

Bjornsen ignored the sarcasm.

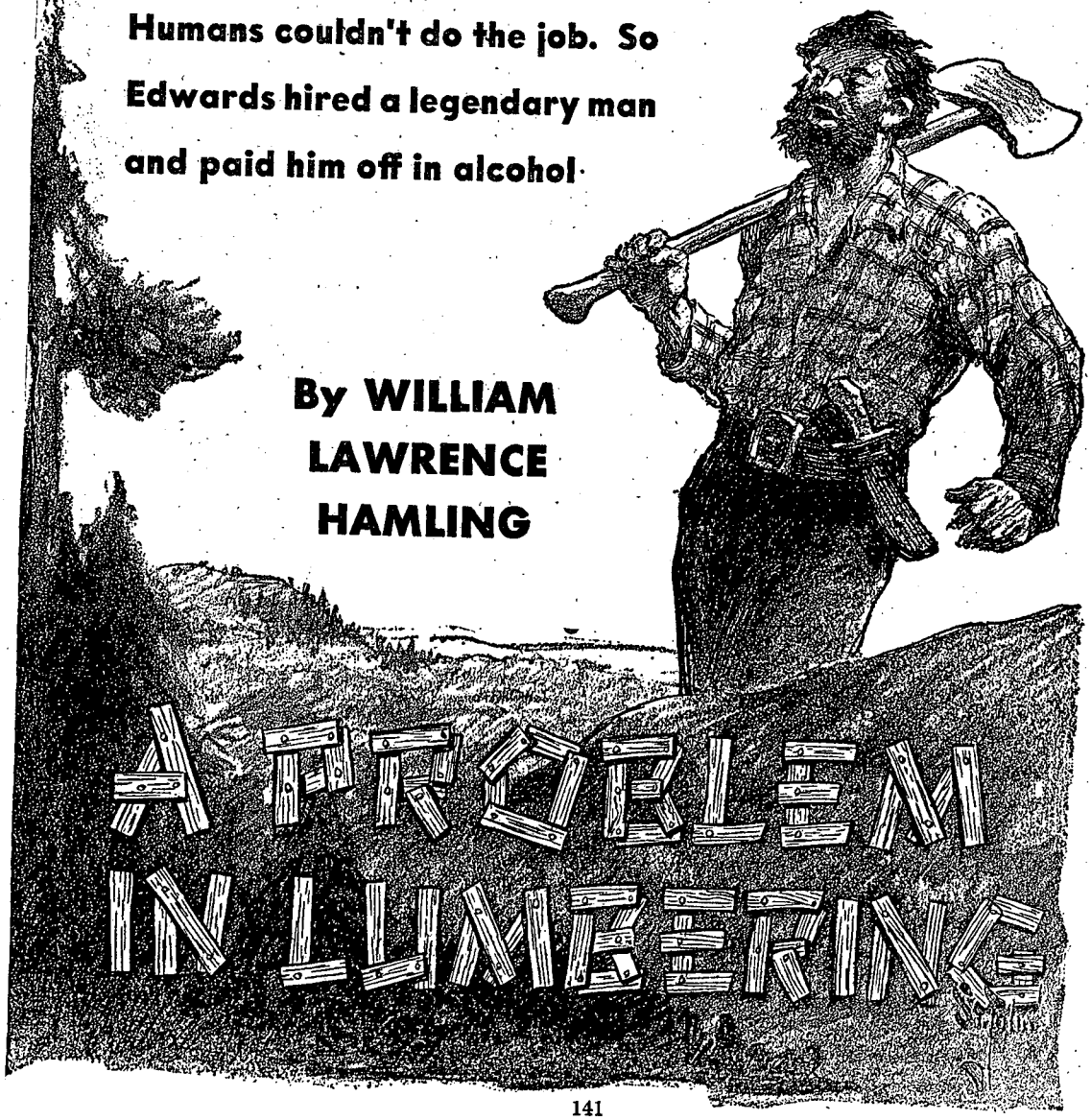
"The job is really very simple. I've got a big order for timber, and instead of hiring men of my own to do the job, I'm giving you a chance. All you have to do is log my tract in a week to meet my contract deadline. If you don't," —Bjornsen sighed painfully—"I'll have to take over your outfit."

"Uh huh," Edwards mumbled. He lit a cigarette and looked at Bjornsen. "Where's this tract located?"

Bjornsen put on his straightest face. "You know that stretch of land just west of Pineville, near Lake Kattigil?

Humans couldn't do the job. So Edwards hired a legendary man and paid him off in alcohol

By WILLIAM LAWRENCE HAMLING


A PROBLEM IN LUMBERING

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That's the place."

Jack Edwards choked on tobacco smoke. "What?" he yelped. "You said a week? Why good Lord, that area couldn't be logged in less than a month!"

Jors Bjornsen shrugged. "You heard what I said. My contract calls for that land to be logged clean in a week—no more, no less. If you can't do it, then I foreclose on your outfit right now."

Jack Edwards stifled a groan that rose in his throat. One week! One week in which to log a strip of land two sections wide!

Bjornsen was watching him, a faint sneer on his heavy features. Edwards felt a hot surge of rage. Damn Bjornsen! The grasping Swede held a sword of Damocles over his head in the form of that $5000 mortgage. And Edwards hadn't seen the color of real money for so long he didn't even know what it looked like. The only reason Bjornsen didn't foreclose immediately was that he didn't consider Edwards' little lumbering camp worthy of the taking. And now Bjornsen had made a deal with Ryerson, who owned the James Mountain Products Co. in King County. Ryerson had to have a whopping pile of lumber in a hurry, and the only place he could get it was from Bjornsen — who had cunningly brought the impossible task of logging this land upon Edwards' shoulders.

Edwards knew that this represented his only chance to save his little logging business, and at the same time pay off the mortgage which Bjornsen held on it. The odds were somewhat like a million to one.

Edwards stood up and tried to keep his voice calm. "All right, Bjornsen," he replied. "I'll see what I can do."

"You better," Bjornsen growled. "Just remember that I've got to have that timber ready for shipment by next week Friday, with a trainload of wood alcohol on my sidings that's ready to move now. I stand to lose a lot of money if it isn't, and by God you better see that I don't!"

Bjornsen stalked from the office, while Edwards, a weariness creeping over his features, sank into a chair. He lit another cigarette. At the least he'd have to have a double crew to do the job. It would be a hell of a task, and he wouldn't get anything out of it except a new lease on his little lumber camp which up to the present moment didn't seem worth saving. And yet that little camp was all he had in the world, and he was damned if he'd give up without a struggle. Too, he'd have to pay wages to a double crew.

The cigarette lost its taste as Edwards mulled over the prospects. He released a sigh and tossed away his cigarette.

Pulling the telephone forward he called his foreman, Muddy Levant.

"Muddy," he said, "I've got a job lined up for you and the boys."

"A job, boss? Did I hear you say job?" Muddy shouted.

Edwards' voice was sour. "Yeah, a job. Come down to the office and I'll tell you about it. I can't use the language I'm going to use over the phone."

"Huh? What's up? You sound as if somebody'd contracted you to drain off the Pineville swamps."

"Worse than that," Edwards muttered. "Come on down."

MUDDY panted into Edwards' office and threw himself into a chair. "What's up, boss? Let me in on it."

Edwards let him in on it. At the same time Muddy Levant learned a lot of new cuss words he had never known

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before. Edwards finished with a heart-rending groan.

"So that's how it stands, Muddy," he said. "We've got exactly one week to log that land—if we don't, there won't be any Edwards Logging Company any more and you'll be looking for a job elsewhere."

"Boss, why in hell did you ever go to Bjornsen for a mortgage in the first place? You know what a money-grabbing louse he is!"

Edwards sighed. "Where else could I get the cash I needed around here? Bjornsen's the only man in this wilderness who's got money!"

Muddy reached for Edwards' pack of cigarettes on the battered desk and helped himself. "Geez, boss, you ain't hardly got enough cash to pay off a double crew! How you going to swing it?"

Edwards shrugged. "I'll still have the business! Look, Muddy, you get the men together, as many as you can find, and have them here by sundown. I'm driving over to Kattigil and make a plan of operations."

"Okay, boss," said Muddy wearily. He consoled himself with another of Edwards' cigarettes and stomped out of the shack.

JACK EDWARDS climbed out of his car. He looked at the vista of towering timber stretching before him and reeled with the immensity of it. Two sections! Why, Lord, there must be close to five! Suddenly Edwards knew that he and his men could never log that fir in a week. Hell, not in a month! He sank down upon the running board of his car and in a running monotone began to curse the ancestors of Jors Bjornsen.

He got up after awhile and walked towards the forests. It had been his intention to map a field of operations, but now he knew it was useless. No matter where he started from it was an impossible task. There were thousands of fir, stretching far beyond his eyesight, towering mightily towards the heavens.

In the midst of the giant fir it was cool and shady. The wind rustled softly through the branches, and its music was a whispering sigh. But Edwards found neither beauty nor solace in the vision. All he saw was a terribly large number of trees that had to be logged within a week. He began wondering what chances a bum had in the city. He heard that one could earn quite a profitable living panhandling.

Suddenly he stopped. He listened.

The ground was trembling as if a sudden earthquake were being born.

The wind rose to a moan and bent the branches of the fir backwards. But it was like no wind which Edwards had ever smelled before. It carried the aroma of all the distilleries in the country combined with the effluvia of a million taverns. It made Edwards feel as if he had suddenly been immersed in a sea of liquors.

And then something moved into his line of vision. He gaped and stared from bulging eyes.

He was looking at a gigantic boot. He moved his eyes up.

He was looking at the baggy knees of a tremendous pair of pants. He moved his eyes further up.

He was looking at a chest that bulged above a great gleaming belt buckle like an overhanging cliff.

Beyond that heroic chest he saw a beard and a vast red nose.

Edwards felt rubbery around the area of his knees. He shrank against the bole of an immense fir tree, hoping that the creature or whatever it was hadn't noticed him.

And then the tree he was leaning

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against leaped suddenly into the sky. Edwards fell to the ground, staring up in terror.

He was looking at an ox, a gargantuan ox, and it was munching Edwards' tree contentedly.

The size of the ox was not the only unusual thing about it, however. It was blue. A deep, glorious blue.

EDWARDS awoke on that realization to find that the tremendous boots were rapidly bearing down on him. He yelped in alarm.

"Eh?" rumbled a deep voice with the tremors of thunder. The giant bent, peering down. Edwards shrank from the huge eyes that were glaring at him. They were red-rimmed and decorated with baggy black pouches at the bottoms.

"WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?" the voice thundered again.

Edwards gulped feebly. "I—I'm a lumberman . . ." he managed to gasp out.

"AH! A lumberman. That's good," the voice shouted, and Edwards was deafened. "BABE! You overgrown ox! Watch out where you're stepping! Can't you see this mortal here? He's a lumberman too!"

Babe eyed Edwards from a bulging brown orb and returned his attention to the trees. He was eating the branches from a dozen fir at a time with gusto.

"W-who are you?" Edwards stammered.

"WHO AM I!" the giant roared. "I'M PAUL BUNYAN, THAT'S WHO I AM!" Then he added, half sheepishly. "But hell, I'm not the same Paul Bunyan I used to be. Most of the logging countries are gone and Babe and I can't work like we used to on the old Red River Valley."

He sighed and Edwards was blown off his feet.

"Used to be a time when Babe and I could log day in and day out for years. But them days is gone now. We gotta spend most of our time sleeping. Course, sleeping ain't so bad as long as I can dream of my old Red River Camps; but lately I just ain't been able to get a decent dream a'tall. Must be the whiskey I've had stored away. Don't agree with me, maybe. You know of any good whiskey around these parts?"

Edwards knew a lot of places where good whiskey was sold, but he doubted that it was in sufficient quantities to satisfy the behemoth before him.

"I think maybe if I could get the right whiskey, I could dream again. HEY BABE! You wantta make yourself sick?"

Edwards reeled under the impact of a sudden idea. Paul Bunyan couldn't dream. He, Edwards, couldn't log this land. Suppose they made a bargain?"

"You say you're Paul Bunyan, huh?" Edwards asked.

"Me and no other!"

"Then I suppose you can swing an axe?"

"HAH! I cut my teeth on one! Look!" The giant reached behind his back and Edwards suddenly found himself staring at the shaft of an axe that was as long as a flagpole. The glittering keen blade was so bright it was blinding.

"I—I—uh—have a proposition to make you . . ." Edwards began.

"A proposition? What sort?"

EDWARDS cleared his throat and eyed the giant uncertainly. "Well, it's like this. I've got to log these sections in one week. But— well, it's impossible. Now if you were to help me me log them, maybe I could get you a

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kind of whiskey that would make you dream."

"Ummmm" Paul Bunyan droned, and it was like the gathering swell of distant thunder. "Where could you get this whiskey? I'd want more than a few drops, you know!"

Edwards thought hard. He had to get Paul Bunyan to help him. It was his only salvation. But to do it he needed whiskey—in sufficient quantities to make the forest giant dream. But where could he get whiskey like that? And especially such an amount? Scotch? Gin? Rye? Bourbon?

Edwards mentally saw himself ordering several hundred barrels of liquor with an empty cash book. Even that wouldn't be enough. It would take a trainload . . . And then he remembered. Bjornsen had said there was a trainload of wood alcohol waiting to be shipped to Seattle. That stuff ought to make anyone dream—if it didn't kill him first!

He stared up at the giant. "I've got some stuff that'll make you dream like you've never dreamt before. It's yours if you help me log these sections."

Paul Bunyan slapped his side in approval. The slap was like a minor earthquake.

"A deal it is," Paul roared. "But first of all we've got to settle the terms." He plucked a young fir from the ground and began combing his beard. "Who pays off first?"

Edwards thought quickly. What if Paul Bunyan was a fake? What if he went back on his part of the bargain after he had been told where the alcohol was? But Edwards knew his back was to the wall and he'd have to take a chance.

"The stuff I'll give you is loaded in tank cars, about seventy of them. I can guarantee the stuff'll make you dream."

Paul Bunyan mused, and it was a deep rumbling roar.

"So you want me to log the land first and get paid after, eh?"

"Well," said Edwards, "if you want to put it that way, yes." He added hastily, "Not, of course, that I don't trust you, or anything like that—"

Paul Bunyan laughed. And his laughter shook the ground sending reverberations against the surrounding hills.

"As you will, as you will! But remember, I want that dream-maker when I'm done with my work!"

"Don't worry about that," Edwards assured him. "When can you start? I'll have a double crew of men to help . . ."

"Help?" rumbled Paul. "I don't need any of your men on a little job like this. But remember—if you don't play square with me, you'll regret it! Paul Bunyan isn't a man to be trifled with!"

Edwards shivered. The giant meant what he said.

Paul stretched. "Well, I guess we've settled everything. So if you don't mind I'll catch a little sleep."

Edwards became skeptical. "But are you sure you'll wake in time to start tomorrow?"

Paul grinned and Edwards looked at twin rows of teeth that might have been giant picket fences guarding the entrance to the Khyber Pass. "Leave that to me and Babe. We've got a system that's never failed us."

"A system?" Edwards frowned puzzledly.

"Yep," Paul replied, pulling a long stick and a coil of rope from a hip pocket. "This wakes me up without fail. I just tuck it by my ear when I go to sleep." He proceeded to fasten the end of the long rope coil to a small cap on the stick. Edwards gasped—that stick

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was a piece of dynamite with a long slow-burning fuse!

"Till tomorrow then," rumbled Paul Bunyan as he swept a massive arm like a scythe and mowed down a hundred fir with his axe to make a resting place.

Edwards turned abruptly and hurried away. Behind him Paul Bunyan was already snoring. . . .

EDWARDS sat in his office, feet parked atop his battered desk, humming. He stayed that way even when he heard the tramp of many feet coming up the dusty road. That would be Muddy Levant with the double crew he had been organizing. Muddy stomped into the office.

"Well, boss, I got 'em. Everything's all set now. When do we start?"

"We don't," said Edwards. He continued to hum.

Muddy frowned. "What's that, boss? Did you say not starting?"

"Exactly, Muddy; and incidentally, you can pay off those men for a day's work and let them go. We don't need them now."

"But, boss," Muddy protested. "Are you sick or somethin?" He gazed queerly at Edwards. "We've got two sections to log and you say we don't need a crew!"

"I've got a crew," Edwards corrected. "Or something."

"You've what?" Muddy leaned forward anxiously. "Look, boss, I know you've been under a strain these last few days, but don't let it get you down. We'll get those sections logged, don't you worry."

Jack Edwards laughed. "Look. Muddy, you think I've gone crazy, but I haven't. We don't have to worry about that timber anymore—at least I don't think we have to, because I've hired a man who can take care of that job in less than a week!"

"You've got a man who can log two sections of timber in less than a week? Look, boss, maybe I'd better get a doc, or somethin, huh?"

Edwards laughed again. "I don't need a doc nor the crew you brought."

Muddy Levant shifted hesitantly. There was doubt and suspicion in his eyes. It was plain to him that Jack Edwards had suddenly gone off his top.

Edwards arose and walked around the desk.

"Look, Muddy, have I ever given you a bum order? Have I ever made a mistake on a logging problem?"

"No, boss, but . . ."

"Well then, that's enough. I'm not explaining, but I've got just the right crew for this job. Now do what I told you."

Muddy Levant mumbled something under his breath and shook his head sadly. But he carried out the order.

IT WAS early morning when Edwards left his car in the bumpy ruts that were meant to be a road. The sun was just peeping over the edge of the mountains.

He stomped through a few miles of tangled forest before he heard thunderous sounds. It was as if some herculean pile-driver were working overtime beyond the mountain range ahead. But Edwards could guess what it was.

When he burst into the clearing that bordered the sections of Bjornsen fir, he stopped dead in his tracks. For a moment his heart jumped wildly and his knees shook. For he gazed upon a sight few men have ever witnessed.

Fully a section of giant fir was stacked in neat piles around the clearing and among the stumped land from which they had been hewn. The stacks reached skyward a hundred feet, and each log was cut as cleanly as if a mighty bandsaw had cleaved through

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it at a single sweep. Then Edwards saw him.

Paul Bunyan was standing on the steeps of a mountain about two miles distant, his massive legs braced wide. His hands were swinging the mighty flashing axe rhythmically. With every stroke he felled a dozen trees, and every stroke was like the moan of a young cyclone.

Standing behind him a few hundred yards was Babe, the big blue ox, calmly stripping the branches from the fallen timber with his huge teeth, trimming them into long straight logs. Paul paused occasionally to gather the logs into a neat pile. It had the appearance of a gambler shuffling a deck of cards.

Flash, stroke, flash, stroke, and the thunder of falling timber. And at every sweep of the blade, Paul let out a roar of glee. He was like the unleashed fury of a thousand lumberjacks working at full blast. He towered above the tallest of the giant fir by many feet, and the power of his mighty strokes shook the ground for miles around.

Edwards stood staring open mouthed as timber fell like wheat before a farmer's scythe. Then he sat down numbly and watched.

The day crept onward as Paul Bunyan clove through the forests. And all day the big blue ox tore at the felled trees, trimming hem. By sunset it was all over. There was hardly a tree standing on the entire five sections Bjornsen owned. Instead there were countless stacks of logs, cut to a perfection unknown by the most skilled lumberjacks.

Edwards continued to sit. By now he was beyond all amazement. He watched the gigantic figure of Paul Bunyan, walking down the mountain towards him, axe slung carelessly over a huge sweat-soaked shoulder. Babe trotted along behind him, licking his chops in satisfaction.

"Gads! What a day! I haven't worked so hard since I logged off the Red River Valley!" Paul bellowed, and Edwards was forced to close his ears or be deafened. "But I can't say when I've enjoyed myself more! I'll have to keep in trim more from now on!" He sighed heavily and it was like the rising moan of a coastal typhoon. He plucked a lone fir from the ground, and began to comb his beard. "And now about that dream maker. . ."

Edwards smiled happily. "The tank cars I mentioned are down on Jors Bjornsen's railroad sidings at Pineville Junction." He pointed out directions to the giant lumberman.

Paul Bunyan waved cheerily and slung his axe at his belt. With Babe, the big blue ox following closely at his heels, he was off.

Edwards eyed the tiers of stacked timber and went into mental ectasy. Even his battered car expressed glee as it chugged homeward.

JORS Bjornsen was in a bad humor. On the previous night someone had gone to his tank cars on the siding at Pineville Junction and emptied each and every one of the wood alcohol that had been in them. It wasn't so much the fact that the alcohol was stolen—it was the incredible sight that had met him of the tank cars being tossed around like empty bottles. Bjornsen could have understood the theft of the wood alcohol, but not the scattering of the tank cars.

Bjornsen slammed out of his car and stalked towards his lumber tract. Once there he took only three more steps.

There was no longer a lumber tract.

As far as he could see, for miles around, the land was bare. Hardly a tree was left standing.

The timber had been cut down, and

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Before his dazed eyes the room faded into a fog from which emerged a man, a girl, and violence

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THE STORY ESCAPES ME

By LEROY YERXA

CURT REED pounded the typewriter at top speed. The novel was well under way and Reed forgot the small, smoke filled room in which he worked. Joan Freemont was his most important and most vivid character. Ever since he titled the story, "Female Winchell," Joan Freemont had dominated the pages.

Reed closed the last of the sixth chapter, however, with a vague, uneasy feeling that every writer gets when his characters start to run away from him. To an outsider, that would sound odd. To Reed, it was pure logic.

Characters are like that, he thought, and rose impatiently to get a glass of water. He opened the window and watched the gray smoke drain downward and out the opening into the clear night.

He sat down once more at the typewriter. For a long time he stared at the keys. Then he ripped the final page out savagely and tore it to bits. His face turned a dull red.

"Godammit!"

He rolled a clean page into place and stared at it. Then he looked once more at the scribbled synopsis he had placed on the table. The whole job should write itself smoothly. He had planned all the angles. Every character did his part but Joan. She had turned into a stubborn, level-headed newspaper columnist with a mind of her own. Reed, in planning the story, wanted Joan Freemont to fall wildly in

Every author wants characters that live. But those in Curt's novel not only lived; they pulled him into their problems

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love with a certain handsome guy named Howard Dean. Dean, according to the plot, owned a string of night clubs and would, of course get Joan in the last chapter.

"Godammit," Reed said again. "She's a stubborn wench. I ought to kill her and start all over again."

But he couldn't. He couldn't because he had fallen for Joan himself. He liked the way she got away from him, insulting the very people she was supposed to like.

That was what had happened in chapter six. Joan had gone to the "Romantic Adventure," a night club owned by Dean, insulted Dean by threatening to print his name in an unfriendly article and had been politely thrown out. As she left, she stuck her tongue out at Dean in a most unladylike manner. Dean, a gentleman who meant what he said, told her to go to hell.

That was the page Reed had torn out of the machine and destroyed.

How was he going to handle Joan Freemont now that the incident had occurred? He dreaded to go on. Once a character stepped out by herself Reed knew the story might double-cross him and come out with an ending that was unexpected, even to the author.

He started typing again, slowly, feeling his way:

"Joan Freemont backed slowly to the door. She was pretending to listen to Dean, but her attention centered on the band practicing at the rear of the club.

" 'Smug Farley was mixed up in that affair," she said, "and I'm going to link his name with yours. 'Smug's' your man. He wouldn't be seen near a robbery if you hadn't sent him."

"You write that," Howard Dean said in a low voice, "and I'll see you stuffed and roasted on the griddle of Hell."

His eyes were pin points of—"

THE typewriter stopped once more.

Reed pushed his chair back and got up. He closed the window and walked into the hall. It was no use. No matter what he *meant* to say, his characters were doing what they damned pleased. He looked at the clock. Ten after twelve. The street and the houses that bordered it were dark and silent.

"Nuts," he said aloud. "I give up."

He undressed and went to bed.

Sleep wouldn't come. That nagging uncertain feeling stuck with him. He had never had this sort of trouble before. A pulp yarn was a pulp yarn. You wrote it to fit the magazine and to fill a certain word limit. You wrote what you damned pleased.

But he couldn't do it.

Curt Reed lay very still, listening to the snow as it blew softly against the window and drifted along the street below. He tried to go back over the plot, reasoning out what was happening to him. Joan Freemont, he decided, was very lovely. He had made no mistake in creating a tall, queenly girl with ash blonde hair and gray eyes. With her purse filled with pencils, notebooks and assorted junk she was ready to hold up the part of an ex-society girl gone newspaper columnist. Neither could Reed find any fault with Dean's character. Dean was a slim, but not silky gentleman who chose to make a living peddling dance bands, liquor and pretty girls to a city of night-club goers. Dean looked good on paper, so why had something sinister crept into the story?

Joan should have fallen for Dean. As for Dean? Well, Reed decided, Joan Freemont was good enough for her author. She should be good enough for Dean. The worrying gave him nothing but a headache. Finally he fell into a fitful slumber.

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CURT REED awakened some time around two in the morning. His head ached fiercely and the bed was torn apart where he had tossed and turned in his sleep. He got up, washed his face with cold water and sat down at the desk. He knew that before he could rest, he had to get "Female Winchell" plotted correctly and on the road to a climax. His work affected him that way. He couldn't leave it alone when things weren't going straight.

He started to type:

"Joan left the club, hesitating at the curb, wondering if she should call a cab. The street was deserted. She turned north and started walking at a brisk pace.

"She didn't see the shadow that detached itself from the door of the 'Romantic Adventure'. She knew nothing of the man who followed her, coat collar tight around his neck."

Reed stopped typing. He was about to shout a worried, "Godammit" again, but he knew it would save none of the trouble he'd made for himself.

Reed knew that his editor couldn't use a gangster yarn. This had been a strictly plotted love story. Now it wanted to make a gang war out of itself, and he couldn't stop it.

He sat for some time, knowing he'd have to write it and hoping for the best. Then a wry smile touched his face. Why not? If he wrote *himself* into the story, perhaps he could be depended on to act normal. Perhaps he would make his own personality powerful enough to push the others back into line.

He leaned over the typewriter once more, and pecking with one finger, deliberately spelled out his name:

"Curt Reed:—" He thought carefully, and then added—*"stood under the pale light near the lamp post watching the slim attractive blonde as she walked swiftly toward him. . . ."*

Reed didn't touch the typewriter again. Up to now his headache had been a throbbing, unnecessary pain in the back of his head. Suddenly something seemed to hit him a terrific blow where the headache had been. The pain shot down his spine and made him stiffen in the chair. His head seemed to twirl around with great speed and the room tilted up and over, and into darkness.

Then the pain receded and he was all right once more.

He was standing on the very corner he had described. He found himself gasping for breath, as though he had been tossed end over end through the air and his wind had been knocked out of him. He held on to the lamp post to steady himself, and his eyes widened with amazement.

He had actually entered the story. He was staring straight at Joan Freemont as the girl approached him from the direction of the 'Romantic Adventure.'

REED wondered how it could happen. How could the author enter his own story and become flesh and blood character? The immediate problem, however, gave him little time to think of anything but Joan Freemont.

She was opposite him now, looking straight ahead, her silken legs carrying her hurriedly away from him.

Then the little man tailing her reached the corner. As he came under the light, he reached into his pocket and drew out something that glinted in the light. Joan was twenty feet away. Reed was the only one who could save her because he had created the story himself, and he knew the thing in the man's hand was a gun. The man lifted the automatic swiftly and fired.

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Not, however, before Reed pushed out his right foot and tripped him. With an oath, the man fell on his face and the gun exploded harmlessly in the air. Joan Freemont whirled around and a tight little cry came from her throat. She stood there, not knowing what to do next. Reed sprang forward and landed squarely on the gunman's back. He pinned him down securely, retrieved the gun and pushed it into his own pocket.

Joan Freemont ran toward him.

"You—you saved my life!"

Reed stood up. He kicked savagely at the figure on the sidewalk.

"Get up on your feet," he said. The little man stood up. His lips were curled into a silent snarl. He stood with his hands at his sides, looking for an avenue of escape. He didn't dare to run. The guy who had knocked him down had his gun.

Joan said:

"It's 'Smug' Farley."

Reed turned to look at her, keeping one eye on Farley.

"I wouldn't know the gentleman," he said. "I hadn't put him in the story."

Joan Freemont's eyes widened.

"The story?"

Reed grinned. It was all so damned silly standing here talking to his own characters.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I guess you wouldn't understand. My name is Curt Reed. You're Joan Freemont, aren't you?"

"Yes." Her lips opened slowly and seemed reluctant to close after the one word was spoken. "But how . . ."

Reed realized he was making a fine mess of things. These people were real flesh and blood creations. He had to treat them as such.

"I—I've read your column and seen your pictures," he lied.

Joan Freemont smiled. It was a frightened little smile.

"But—if you follow my stuff, surely you know of Smug Farley and his boss."

He had to think fast now. Smug had followed the girl from the "Romantic Adventure." He must be one of Dean's men.

"He carries a rod for Howard Dean," he said. "I've heard of him."

Smug Farley was getting impatient.

"Get this introduction over with," he said, "and decide what direction we're going in. Me, I don't like this night air."

Joan was still staring at Reed, trying to catalogue him in her memory.

Reed felt all that. He felt it because he knew just how Joan would react under most conditions.

"You can go," he said to Farley, "and don't try to pull a gun on the street again. A bad policeman might see you."

Farley faded away into the darkness. He had a break and he took advantage of it before Reed could change his mind.

"I suppose its 1234 Arlington Avenue for you?" Reed said to the girl.

At once he knew that he had opened his fool mouth again. That was the home address he had given Joan back in the first chapter.

"Yes," she said. "I've had enough . . ." She stiffened. "You know where I live? Say, mister, just where did you pick up all this information? That address isn't listed."

This time he was ready with the answer.

"I happend to know everything about you," he said. "I'm one of your most loyal fans. I even know the toothpaste you use—Dental Health."

He knew by the flashing eyes that she was pleased.

"Good," she said. "Then let's get a cab. I've had enough walking for one night—even with you for a bodyguard."

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JOAN FREEMONT was every bit as lovely as Curt Reed had pictured her. In the dim light of the cab, she continued to stare at him with a great deal of admiration.

"You must follow me around like a shadow, to know so much of what is going on."

He admitted that he did and tried to hide the smile that kept coming to his lips.

"One thing I don't understand," he said frankly, "is what do you have against Dean?"

It was a normal question for any writer to ask after what had happened. At the mention of Dean her lips closed together in a firm line. She was silent for several blocks. Finally she turned to him once more and a friendly smile came over her face making it lovelier than ever.

"I don't know why not," she said, as though thinking aloud. "Yes, I think I'll tell you."

Reed waited.

"Dean is mixed up in some manner with a gang of jewel thieves," she said. "His name is never linked with any of the robberies, but there has never been one robbery by this gang that took place outside of his clubs. My paper, for one, won't even touch him. The others don't dare say anything until they have the goods on him."

This was a plot twist that he had not anticipated. No wonder his intended hero and heroine couldn't get together.

"I had never thought of that," he said. "What makes you think—"

She was eager now, ready to confide in him.

"For the past six months I've been working the Dutchess jewel case," she said. "Marie Weems—you know her, the old society hellion. She had fifty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds taken from her at the 'Romantic Adventure.' Dean was too darn nice about it. He offered a big reward for the thieves. He insisted on paying her half the value of the jewels, so that she wouldn't feel that his club had brought her bad luck. Of course it was a noble gesture and the Marie Weems case resulted in publicity that brought Dean three times that amount of cash during the following week. Dean asked the papers to leave the case alone, and they did. I couldn't ever mention it in my column."

Reed nodded sympathetically and waited for her to go on.

"I've tried to get something on Dean. Something that would put him behind bars. He repaid my efforts by sending Smug Farley out to get me. It's growing into something that I can't leave alone, even if I wanted to."

It certainly is, Reed thought. It's growing into a story that I'd a damn sight rather live than write. Too many angles.

"And that's where you came in," Joan finished. "And a darned good thing you did."

She leaned back against the seat and stared at him with partly closed eyes.

"You know, I have the strange feeling that I've known you sometime or someplace. That we were very close friends."

Reed wanted to tell her that he was actually her father. At least, he thought, she's my brain child. A damned pretty one, too.

They reached Joan's apartment and Reed recognized it at once. He held the door for her and they went up stairs and down a long, well lighted hall. He stopped before apartment 6 and pushed the door open.

While she stared at him, he said:

"You forgot to lock your door when you went out this morning."

Half way inside, she turned. There was no mistaking the fright in her eyes

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now.

"How did you know that? How did you know the number of the apartment?"

He shrugged.

"A close follower of your column, remember?"

He turned abruptly and walked down the hall toward the stairs. He felt her eyes staring at his back. He grinned, wondering what his favorite character would have done if he had tried to kiss her. She was pretty nice, but he had learned that Joan had a mind of her own. Probably he would have gotten his face slapped for his trouble.

CURT REED was thankful that he had made his own city the setting for "Female Winchell". Yet, being involved in the story himself, he didn't dare to return to his own apartment. If he did, would he find *himself* waiting at the door? He didn't want to take any chances. Things were complicated enough now.

He directed the cab driver to a small hotel near Joan Freemont's apartment and paid for a room. Once in bed, he tried to plan his next move.

This much was clear. He had been thrown into his own fiction story. He had become one of the characters and was living the story.

As long as Joan was involved, he wanted to go on living the story. If he could walk back into his own apartment, he wasn't entirely sure that Joan would continue to exist.

Tomorrow he would make a test. He would find out just what sort of a mess he was in.

. . . It's rather nerve shaking to face yourself, or at least an image of yourself. Curt Reed slipped into the bath room and locked the door. Every nerve in his body was taut. He had walked calmly into his own building, climbed the stairs to his apartment and entered it. The typewriter was filled with a half covered sheet of "Female Winchell."

Either the story was writing itself or there were two Curt Reeds. Everything that had happened to Joan and himself was recorded on pages that had been blank last night.

He heard the door open and ducked into the bathroom, his heart pounding at a terrific rate. He knelt, after turning the safety catch, and stared through the keyhole. He saw himself come into the room, look around and sit down near the window. He saw himself pick up a book and make some notes in it. It was his diary.

Then he saw himself, the Curt Reed who had escaped the plot of "Female Winchell," leave the room again. Cautiously, he unlocked the door and slipped into the room. Sounds came from the kitchenette. He moved across the living room and into the hall. Once outside, he hurried to the street.

What would have happened if Curt Reed had met Curt Reed? He preferred to evade the question.

Joan Freemont stood near the huge executive desk, arms akimbo, feet well apart on the deep rug. It was obvious that the small, well-groomed, bald-headed man behind the desk was at this moment taking more from her than he wanted to take. Yet, the fact that his mild blue eyes were bright and his hands clenched did not worry Joan.

"I've had good stories on Dean before," she insisted in a cold voice. "You refused to let me use them. Are you afraid of your perfect little reputation?"

Grant Owen owned the *Journal*. He didn't like to have his employees tell him how to run it. His face turned an off shade pink.

"I tell you, Joan," he said, "if any-

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one else talked to me this way, I'd throw them out. Why do you take advantage of your sex to give me hell? I can't fight Dean unless you get the goods on him."

The girl laughed. It was a tight, unhappy little laugh.

"*Position,*" she scoffed. "What position do I have around here? I get a chance to say what I wish in my column if it doesn't interfere with your sense of right and wrong."

Owen straightened in his chair. The pink glow that had moved upward from his collar grew brighter.

"Get something on Dean that will hold up," he said. "Then we'll smoke him out."

"Something we can prove," Joan repeated. "Dean pays the lawyers who defend his gang. He fixes it so they can operate in his clubs. He makes suckers out of us all. Let me use the column to smoke him out. Once he loses his temper, he'll start getting tough and make a mistake somewhere. The very fact that one of his gunman tried to murder me ought to be front page copy."

Grant Owen shrugged.

"Unfortunately you can't prove that," he said. "That's the trouble, Joan. You guess a lot of things, but what do you really know? Get proof and we'll tie Dean up in knots. Until then . . ."

He shook his head and she knew she had been dismissed. She turned and walked slowly to the door. With her hand on the knob, she turned and faced him once more.

"If you find my body in the river some morning," she said, "for Heaven's sake don't run the story of my death. It might make Dean angry."

She went out quickly, closing the door with a quick twist of her wrist.

DIZZY DARROW was very unhappy. Dizzy was Joan Freemont's photographer and he had been hanging around the "Romantic Adventure" night club all night. It was eight in the morning and with his head placed carefully on the palms of his hands, he sat in a small booth of Pete's Breakfast Car. Everytime the cook rang the call bell, or a dish rattled, Dizzy winced and scowled. His head was somehow connected to a stomach full of louzy whiskey and the connection brought nothing but short-circuited dizziness.

No camera, no story, no nothing. He wondered why he had ordered eggs and bacon. He couldn't eat them. Someone placed a hand on his shoulder. It was a small, warm hand. A very understanding hand. He looked up and saw a blurred vision of Joan Freemont dressed in tweeds with a little sport hat to match, and a soft white blouse that gave the suit a feminine touch worth looking at.

"Did you get anything?" Joan's face was eager, and yet it was tired. She acted as though she didn't expect much from him. He was glad.

"Nothing," he said. "The place was dead all night. I had to hold on to myself to keep from poking Dean in the face when he threw you out."

She nodded.

"You did all right." She sat down. "I'm hungry. Guess I'll try a big helping of eggs and bacon."

Dizzy shuddered.

"Have mine," he offered. "I ordered the stuff without the slightest idea of what I'd do with it. Right now, a tall glass of rat poison would suit me perfectly."

Joan Freemont studied the slim, dilapidated Dizzy Darrow. Dizzy was an invaluable partner. He looked his part perfectly. Dizzy had that gaunt, my-God-how-I-suffer look on his face most of the time. He lived on a diet of mixed drinks, managed to keep his ears open

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and his mouth shut. Dizzy did the foot work for her, and she kept him in money that allowed him to drink himself into one stupor after another. Dizzy wanted it that way, and in the five years he'd supplied Joan with material, he evidently hadn't moved any closer to death's door for all his transgressing. Dizzy Darrow had a shock of pure gray hair, red-rimmed eyes and an Adam's-apple that defied any attempt to imprison it.

His order of bacon and eggs came and he managed to escape it by pleading that he wasn't hungry. He ordered a small glass of tomato juice and stared at it balefully while Joan ate.

"I picked up a society note for you," he said wryly. "June, the hat check girl, says that Mrs. VanWry is entertaining at the 'Adventure' tonight."

Joan stopped eating. The fork, hovering in mid air, dropped to the plate.

"VanWry? The stout old gal who's throwing her ex-husband's money away in bushel baskets?"

Dizzy nodded.

"The same. June says Dean's having a private room prepared for them. Champagne by the bath-tub-full and all that kind of thing. It will net the club some nice publicity, not to mention a few hundred smackers."

JOAN had lost her appetite. She was thinking very hard. Thinking that whenever Mrs. VanWry threw a party there would be a lot of expensive gems wrapped around fat necks and thick wrists. There hadn't been a jewel robbery for six weeks. A private room at the "Romantic Adventure". A perfect setup.

She stared at Dizzy.

"You're pretty good pals with June, aren't you?"

Dizzy blushed modestly.

"We get along," he said.

Joan smiled.

"Good," she said. "Could June talk one of Dean's waiters out of serving the VanWry party tonight?"

Dizzy looked puzzled.

"June could talk Tarzan into deserting the jungle," he said. "What's the score?"

"Nothing to worry about," Joan said. "You're going to act as a waiter at the VanWry party."

Dizzy Darrow recoiled slowly.

"Me? I ain't no stuffed shirt. How in hell could I do that?"

"Think you can serve wine without spilling it on the customers?"

Darrow stood up unsteadily, placing a hand on the edge of the table.

"In that case, I better start working on the idea."

Joan wasn't sure.

"You'd better get a few hours sleep first," she said. "You need it."

Darrow took three unsteady steps out into the room. He stopped short and turned, weaving back and forth on his feet.

"Yeah," he said. "I guess maybe I'd better."

CURT REED took a long walk. It didn't do much good. It didn't answer any questions. Was he living in a dream, or had he actually passed from one life to another? Curt Reed, the Curt who was writing "Female Winchell" still lived at his apartment and spent his time writing the novel. He, the Curt who had been thrown into Joan Freemont's life, was wandering around the city trying to figure out what it was all about.

Every move he made was going down on paper. Every bit of his story with Joan was being recorded back at the apartment. Written by the Curt Reed who he had watched through the key hole.

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He wondered what would happen when the typewriter recorded his visit, and the fact that he had been hiding in the bathroom. A funny thing, this business of spying on yourself. Not entirely clear, but interesting.

He thought of Joan, and the little gunman, Smug Farley, who had taken a potshot at her only last night. The picture he conjured up in his mind of Joan and the danger she faced, sent him forward at a fast pace, toward the "Romantic Adventure" club.

He knew this much. Joan was trying to get something on Howard Dean. She was probably right when she said that Dean was a crook. He had no other reason for trying to get her out of the way.

Reed swore softly. This is what he got for trying to write a novel. It was his fault that the whole thing had started. Yet, looking at it from another angle, he had had very little to say about the actions of his characters.

For the present, it was necessary that he try to help Joan. He didn't want to go directly to her, because every time he was near her, he opened his big mouth and made her wonder how he knew so much. That crack about knowing the toothpaste she used was a honey. He chuckled. An author knows everything there is to know about his heroine. He wondered what Joan would think if she knew he, Curt Reed, had created her on a blank sheet of paper. How would she react if he told her that she slept with her blonde head cuddled in the curve of her right arm. If he admitted that he knew all about her pink nightgown, her black undies, and that little mole on her left side? He chuckled, experiencing the same protecting feeling that had brought him here to help her. It was very nice knowing all this about the person you loved. Dammit, how was he going to convince her that she should feel the same way toward him?

WITH Joan Freemont occupying his mind, Reed passed the night club and had to retrace his footsteps to enter the lobby. Like most clubs, the lobby looked washed out and seedy in the sunlight. The doors, three of them, bordered with polished brass, were unlocked. He went in quietly and stood at the top of the three carpeted steps that led to the main dining room. He stood there, watching the orchestra practice swing music in shirt sleeves. Finally a man detached himself from a little group near the orchestra and wandered toward him.

It was Smug Farley. An ugly smile lighted his pimply face as he recognized Reed. He kept coming, his right hand in his pocket, eyes frozen, an ugly grin on his face.

"Well, well," he said. "If it ain't the shining knight himself."

Reed stood his ground, wondering if Farley would pull a gun. He didn't. He stood before Reed and slowly folded his arms across his thin chest.

"I want to thank you for not turning me in last night." It was obvious that he didn't want to do any such thing. "It might have been embarrassing to sit in a cell all night. The boss gets mad at people who interfere with his business."

Reed grinned.

"He's the very man I came to see," he said. "Is he around?"

Smug Farley nodded his head and jerked it in the direction of several doors that were to the right of the dance floor.

"In his office," he said. "In fact he wanted to see you. I was just going out to look you up."

"Good," Reed said. "I saved you the trouble."

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Farley moved away from him carefully, staying far enough to one side, watching every move Reed made. They reached a dark, polished door that led beyond the main dining room. Farley knocked gently.

"Come in."

Farley pushed the door open and waited until Reed passed him and entered Dean's office.

The office wasn't strange to Curt Reed. He had created it. In fact, he had described the whole club in the first chapter of "Female Winchell." He advanced across the office and faced Howard Dean.

He knew that Dean always wore brown suits, with carefully matched socks, shirts and ties. He even knew Dean's personal touch of wearing tan underclothing of expensive silk. That part might have embarrassed Dean, but Reed had no intention of mentioning it.

One thing caught Reed unprepared. Dean was as he had been written into the book "Female Winchell," a tall, handsome man with jet black hair and black penetrating eyes. However, the friendly smile that Reed had given him in the book did not exist. This was a clean cut face, but it never smiled. The corners of these eyes had never wrinkled with laughter. They were cold and expressionless.

Dean stood up and looked questioningly at Farley.

Farley grinned.

"This is the guy who spoiled the fun last night," he said. "He came in by himself. Wants to talk to you."

Dean nodded curtly.

"Wait outside," he said.

Farley went toward the door and Reed heard it click as he closed it. He couldn't take his eyes off Howard Dean.

"What kind of a cut are you getting out of this?" Dean asked.

"I don't think I understand," Reed said. He did, partly, but he didn't intend to show his hand. "I came here to tell you to lay off Joan Freemont. I didn't get very tough last night, but next time I'll break that little runt's arm if he trys to harm the girl."

The expression on Dean's face didn't change, but his eyes flashed angrily. They reminded Reed of two shiny lumps of hard coal.

"I didn't expect you to get tough," Dean said. "People who know me, don't usually try."

REED stood very still. The room was quiet. No sounds drifted in from outside. He had nothing more to say.

"Just what is your interest in the female snooper?" Dean asked.

Reed kept his mouth shut.

Dean sat down. The continued silence was troubling him. He was accustomed to having his questions answered.

"I asked you why you were interested in Miss Freemont."

A slow smile touched Reed's face.

"I'm in love with her," he said coolly, "and I resent having people aim guns at her."

The eyes behind the desk softened slightly.

"That's all?"

"That's all," Reed said. "Except that if she thinks you're a crook, that's good enough for me. I'm staying pretty close to her from now on. If that two-bit gangster of yours wants her, he'll have to get me first."

He had said just a little too much. He knew that when Dean's finger touched the call button on his desk. Reed leaned forward slightly, his fingers touching the desk top. Dean stood up. The movement was quite casual. The door clicked softly behind Reed. His

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fingers touched the heavy inkwell. There were light footsteps behind him.

He heard the click of a safety catch. Swiftly he picked up the inkwell, took a quick step to the right and pivoted. He let go of the heavy onyx base, sending it straight into Smug Farley's face. At the same time, the automatic in Smug's hand went off with a deafening explosion.

Farley didn't fire again. He stood there, tottering back and forth, the gun hanging in limp fingers. Then he pitched forward and lay on the carpet. He was very still.

His face was bashed in where the inkwell hit him. Blood spurted from the wound.

Reed dropped to his knees, grasped the gun and came up, turning on Dean.

"Drop the gun!"

He stopped, half way around, and let the automatic slide out of his hand. It hit the carpet beside Farley's body. Reed turned slowly, staring down the barrel of a thirty-two.

Dean was cool. His hand was steady and his index finger curled lightly around the trigger.

"Don't hurry, tough guy," Dean said softly. "You're not going anywhere."

JOAN FREEMONT was worried. Only last night a man had saved her life and walked calmly away without letting her know where he was going. Something more powerful than a casual friendship had grown out of those few minutes together.

The fact that he had saved her life meant a great deal to her. There was more to it than that, though. How had he learned so much about her? He seemed more like a life-long friend than a stranger who had met her under a street lamp.

All morning, she wondered when he would show up again. If he knew so much about her, why didn't he come down to the office?

She felt somehow that she would need him again. Dizzy had arranged to trade places with one of the waiters who would work at the VanWry party. Joan had called Mrs. VanWry and arranged to be present. That part was easy. Her column was widely read. Mrs. VanWry would get a nice write-up tomorrow morning. Mrs. VanWry knew the value of good publicity. She was a widow and rich. She didn't want to be a widow forever.

Now that everything was ready for a showdown, depending, of course, on what Howard Dean decided to do about the whole affair, where was the man who had saved her life?

Joan tried unsuccessfully that afternoon to write the column for the following day. For once, Reed's 'Female Winchell' couldn't find the right words. Finally she gave up. Gave up with that vague feeling that something terrible had happened. Something that might throw all her plans into the waste basket and leave her in the uncomfortable position of once more fighting alone.

Damn Grant Owen, owner of the *Journal*. Why couldn't he see what Dean was up to? Why couldn't he co-operate, at least to the extent of giving her a few tough boys from Circulation for a body guard?

Remembering handsome, cool-headed Curt Reed, Joan felt more helpless than she ever had before. The dummy, she thought. Here I am in love with him and he doesn't even care to come around.

When she remembered how much he knew about her she blushed. He could learn more, if he'd only show her that he cared enough to help her out when she needed him most.

She stared at her typewriter for a

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long time, trying to pretend that she had the Howard Dean story on ice, and was going to write it up once and for all.

It was useless. She grew panicky and frightened.

He was an odd sort, the who who had given back her life and taken her home in a cab. He hadn't even asked for a kiss. She half wished that he had. At least that would have been something to remember. A worried frown wrinkled her forehead. She found her compact in her bag and opened it, staring at the mirror.

Was there anything wrong with her face? Usually men tried to kiss her and got their face slapped for the trouble. She shrugged.

"You've been working alone for a long time, Joan," she told herself aloud. "You can do it again, but somehow it isn't half so much fun."

DIZZY DARROW felt uncomfortable and nervous in the tight fitting black jacket and bow tie. There were half a dozen waiters in the small, brightly lighted dining room. The room was one of a half dozen hidden behind spangled walls at the rear of the club. The table which he had helped set was hidden under an array of candles, expensive dishes and wine glasses.

Darrow was scared. No one had paid any attention to him. Winters, the guy who had changed places with him, was an agency man. He hadn't been able to come at the last minute, and Darrow was sent to take his place. That was Darrow's story and he was stuck with it.

The room felt very warm in spite of the ventilating system, and Darrow stepped out into the hall that led to the alley. He smoked half a cigarette, glanced at his watch. Nine o'clock. The guests were to arrive at nine-fifteen. Joan was already around. He saw her twice, wandering about with half a dozen barflies on her trail. Joan had discarded the gray suit and looked better than most of the crowd in a revealing, shimmery thing of pale blue satin.

Darrow shook his head in admiration. The boss was plenty cute, he decided. Damn shame some nice guy didn't do something about it. Darrow had three kids of his own, and a wife who made him account for his pay check every Friday. Otherwise, he might have made a play for the boss himself. Not that it would get him anywhere. He wasn't the type.

Darrow still felt warmish around the neck. He had walked slowly down the hall, pushed open the fire door that led to the alley and pinched out the cigarette. He tossed it into the darkness.

Starting back, he thought he heard a muffled sound behind one of the doors that led from the hall. He stopped short, leaning against the wall trying to act as though he was half asleep. It came again, very faintly, from the door nearest him.

He walked calmly to the door and tried the knob. It was locked. Someone was there. Someone who wanted help and needed it badly. Howard Dean had put someone on ice. Darrow wondered if the someone might be of value to Joan. The boss sure needed help.

He looked both ways aulong the hall. The sounds of synthetic laughter came from the dining room he had just left. Mrs. VanWry, bless the fat slob, was arriving. Under cover of the noise, Darrow tried the door again. He gave it a quick jerk. No results.

He was handy with locks. He had opened quite a few stubborn doors in his time. He reached for a small key ring and selected a key after squinting

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long and hard at the key hole. He tried it, wrenching it at first gently, then with all the strength he could find in his thin, wiry fingers. The key twisted in the lock and turned reluctantly. The door was open.

He stepped in, closing it behind him. The place was black. He had entered a janitor's closet. His chin contacted the upper end of a mop handle, making him swear under his breath.

He could feel something touch his ankle. Something that lashed out and kicked him. He went to his knees.

"For Crissake lay still," he said. "I'm not gonna murder you."

He felt around in the darkness. The figure on the door was a man. Ropes were lashed around his body, tied behind his back. Darrow struggled with them and two arms came free. Darrow said:

"Keep quiet. I'm getting the gag out of your mouth."

He fulfilled that promise, and wondering who he had rescued, opened the door a crack. The hall was still deserted. Dishes rattled in the VanWry dining room. They would be looking for him.

"I don't know who the hell you are," he said, "but if you're an enemy of Dean's your a pal of mine. I'm going. Stick here until I've been gone for five minutes. Get the hell out of here by the back door. If you get that grateful feeling, you can send the check to Dizzy Darrow care of the *Journal* or to Joan Freemont."

He thought he heard a quick gasp in the darkness, but he didn't wait for more. He opened the door wide enough to slip into the hall, adjusted his coat lapels and marched bravely toward the private dining room. The smile in his face looked as though it had been painted there by an amateur artist. It felt that way, too.

JOAN smiled at Mrs. VanWry and Mrs. Van Wry smiled back. They were sitting opposite each other at the long table. Joan could feel Howard Dean's eyes on her back. Eyes that burned into her.

"Before your guests are seated," Joan said, "tell me, Mrs. VanWry, is that the VanWry diamond you're wearing tonight?"

The fat lady gurgled with delight. She flashed the huge stone, folding the stubby fingers of her left hand over the right.

"The real thing," she said, pleased that it hadn't gone unnoticed. "I feel with Harold dead, I should be brave. I should face the world and wear bright, happy things."

Harold VanWry was probably happy for the first time in years, Joan thought. Why shouldn't his widow be happy also. There were plenty of jewels in the room. Everyone seemed to be trying to display what treasure trove they had managed to hold on to through the crash. The dining room pulsated with not very clever wit, and the bright reflections of diamonds, rubies and pearls.

"I should say that the party was a tribute to the late Mr. VanWry," Joan said. "That the lavish display of diamonds was an expression of bravery on the part of his wife."

Mrs. VanWry tittered.

"That's very nice," she said.

Joan felt, somehow, that Howard Dean wasn't going to waste any time tonight. She knew from the look he had given her that the man was nervous. She hadn't seen Smug Farley around, although she had looked for him. There was something strange in the wind. Something that troubled Dean. She hoped that she was it. Hoped that he was at last showing that one emotion that make men equal, fright.

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She continued her conversation with the fat lady, but her mind was on Dean, standing there at the door like a sentinel. She dreaded having to stand up and pass him on the way out.

CURT REED stood up. He was sore and his wrists and legs ached where the ropes had been tied tightly around them. The man who freed him had said:

"Dizzy Darrow, care of the *Journal*, or to Joan Freemont."

He stood close to the door, listening. Two minutes passed. He counted them under his breath. Three . . .

Something was going to happen. Something very unpleasant. Curt Reed had a score to settle. He intended to settle it before he left the club.

Outside, everything was silent. He opened the door. As he did so, the lights went out in the hall. Darkness closed over him, but because he had been in the closet for so long, his eyes were ready for it. He could see quite well even in the dark.

He heard the high-pitched scream of a woman. It ended in a frightened throaty rasp. He started to run toward the sound, sure of himself, seeing everything in that dim half light. Somewhere ahead a door slammed. He saw a man running swiftly toward the main room of the club. It was Dean.

He followed Dean, watched him cut across a corner of the dining room and enter his office. Reed stood still where the hall entered the dining room. Behind him, in the room from which Dean had emerged, an unholy uproar was going on.

The place was still in darkness. The orchestra continued to play madly. The customers were shouting for light. Dean's office door opened and the man came back along the hall, feeling his way in the darkness. He moved swiftly, sure of where he was going. He disappeared behind the door. The lights came on.

Everything went back to normal, everything, that is, but the frightened sobbing in the room Dean re-entered.

It had all taken place in less than three minutes. If it hadn't been for those long hours spent in the darkened closet, Reed would never have seen what had happened. No one could have seen. Only Dean, knowing every inch of the hall, could have made that trip so swiftly.

CURT REED, the sudden flash of light blinding him, stood still until he could see. Sounds of grief continued to come from the small dining room. He heard several men talking loud, with angry voices. Some one suggested that they telephone the police.

Reed entered the room. A long table had been set. A group of society people stood around it. Two men had helped a fat old dowager to her chair. She was babbling incoherently and holding one hand to her heart.

"It was a gift from my husband." She was very upset. "The thief grabbed my hand and pulled the ring off as the lights went out."

She looked around her at the flustered party.

"Somebody do something! she screamed.

Howard Dean had been talking over a French phone in one corner of the room. He placed the receiver gently in the cradle and came to Mrs. VanWry's side.

"I've notified the police," he said. "It's quite obvious that the stone was stolen by someone in this room. We will remain here until the police arrive."

At once he was the center of unhappy attention. Scowls and angry words were shot at him.

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Curt Reed wondered just how he should handle it. He felt pressure on his arm, turned and saw Joan Freemont staring up at him.

"Hello," she said in a low voice. "It seems that you arrived at the zero hour."

He nodded.

"I'm sure it was Dean," she said. "But, how can we prove it. Everytime there is a robbery it happens this way. We were blinded in the dark. Dizzy, my partner, says someone knocked him down in the dark. He thinks it was a man."

Reed nodded grimly. A police siren sounded in the distance. Everyone was waiting. No one had anything to say.

"I—I feel so helpless," Joan said. "I'm glad you came."

Her hand was still on his arm. He squeezed it lightly and she returned the pressure. Two uniformed policemen broke into the room. They must have represented the thin and fat of the department. The fat one had a thick lower lip that hung down like washing on the line.

"What the hell's going on up here?" he said, and the thin one repeated the sentence, accenting it in a different place.

Howard Dean stepped forward.

"There's been a robbery, officer," he told the fat man with the hanging lip. "Mrs. VanWry's diamond was stolen. Taken from her hand when the electric power failed."

Droop Lip stared hard at Dean. It was obvious that he had his own ideas of the night club owner.

"Seems like a lot of lights have been going out here lately," he said.

Dean stiffened.

"I'd be careful of what I said, if I were you."

Droop lip grinned. It wasn't pleasant.

"Until we get proof?"

Curt Reed moved forward and faced the pair. He was smiling.

"Did it occur to you to search Dean's safe, officer?"

Dean's face turned white, then color came back quickly.

"Why you—how in hell did—"

He paused, realizing that he had opened his mouth too soon. His lips tightened.

"The lights were off for no more than two minutes," he said. "We were all absolutely blinded."

Droop Lip looked at Reed questioningly.

"That's right," he said. "Now what?"

Reed's smile remained set.

"Someone moved around freely in the dark," he said. "Dean knows the layout of the club better than anyone else. He's been mixed up in these messes before. Why not try Dean's safe."

Droop Lip looked interested.

"How come the safe?" he asked suspiciously. "You wouldn't know nothing about that safe would you, Bud?"

Reed shrugged.

"I know that Dean left this room while the lights were out. He had me locked in a dark closet all afternoon and I came out with eyes like a cat. He spent a minute in the office and hurried back to this room just as the lights went on."

He turned to Dean.

"Nice timing, Mister Dean."

JOAN FREEMONT sat at her desk in the *Journal* office. A smile made her face radiant. She stared at the headlines:

FEMALE WINCHELL TRACKS DOWN JEWEL THIEF

The *Female Winchell* idea was Curt Reed's. He insisted that she take all the credit.

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She looked at him sitting on the edge of the desk, legs dangling, hair mussed down over one eye. His eyes were sparkling.

"Nice story," he said. "And now, Miss Freemont, I'll have to be excused for a few hours. I'll see you tonight. Prepare for that fatal question, because I'm going to ask it."

She wadded up a sheet of paper and threw it at him.

"You're pretty sure of yourself, aren't you?"

Reed nodded.

"You don't know *how* sure," he said.

CURT REED climbed the stairs to his apartment and entered cautiously. It was empty. The other Reed would be away for some time. He had watched him go out five minutes ago and enter the restaurant across the street. The apartment looked very good. Stacked on one side of the desk was the almost completed story of "Female Winchell."

He had to finish the last chapter. He sat down and started to think.

There were two Curt Reeds. In the first place, he had to write himself out of the story and back here to the apartment where he belonged. He wasn't sure it would work, but it should. It had the first time.

He started to write slowly.

"Curt Reed climbed the stairs to the apartment. It was empty, and he felt good, getting back to it.

"'That,' he announced to the four walls, 'finishes the Adventure of the Wandering Author.'"

He leaned back and sighed. Would this bring the two Curt Reeds back into one? He hoped so. He went to the window and started to watch the restaurant across the street. He watched for a full hour. At last he saw that it was empty save for a man behind the counter and a lone waitress picking her teeth at a front table. He grinned. She was a good advertisement.

Most important of all, Curt Reed, the other Curt, didn't come out.

He returned to the typewriter and sat down again. A happy little smile played with his lips. He leaned forward and wrote:

"Joan, I know that I don't deserve anyone half as fine as you are, but will you—that—is—could you—"

She smiled at him from half closed lids.

"Curt, you darn fool. Was there any doubt?"

Curt threw his arms about her. . ."

He stopped typing and stood up. He went back to the window and looked down at the quiet, tree-lined street. This time there was no worry in his eyes. The smile refused to go away, and after a while it grew into a wide, pleased grin.

"That's the way to handle your characters," he announced. "Let them handle you."

He turned, went to the bathroom and turned on the shower. He started to undress while hot water filled the room with a fine, warm fog. He couldn't see himself in the mirror but he knew the grin wouldn't desert him for a long time.

"Tonight," he said dreamily, "I'll pop the question, just as I wrote it into the novel. I won't have to work on 'Female Winchell' any more. The rest of the story will write itself."

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A PROBLEM IN LUMBERING

(Concluded from page 147)

was stacked in tiers everywhere. Each was trimmed to perfection and the stacks reached towards the heavens more than a hundred feet. Edwards was leaning against one of the stacks with Muddy Levant beside him. Muddy had almost the same expression on his face as Bjornsen had.

"Hello, Bjornsen!" Edwards said cheerily.

"Who—what—how—" Bjornsen blurted.

"Job's all finished," Edwards drawled. "Not bad for two days' work, eh? And now about that mortgage . . ."

"I—I was just coming to see you about that," Bjornsen muttered. In fact, he had been about to foreclose. In the two days that passed since he had given Edwards the job of logging his sections, Bjornsen had thought better of it. He knew that Edwards could never do it, and had made up his mind to put his own men on the job. Ryerson had extended the time limit on his contracts. He wouldn't have to bother with Edwards now.

In a daze Bjornsen fumbled in his coat pocket for the mortgage he had brought along. Edwards grabbed it blithely.

"Thanks, Bjornsen," Edwards said. "Oh, by the way, I heard about your trainload of wood alcohol getting pushed around. Tsk tsk. Too bad. Who the hell would be thirsty enough to want that suff? Be seeing you!"

Edwards walked away, whistling, with Muddy Levant following slowly behind him. Muddy wasn't so sure just who needed a doc now. But he did know who needed a drink. And Muddy needed one bad.

But he wasn't the only one.

"How—who—what—" Bjornsen muttered bewilderedly to himself. He sat down hard upon a stump for his knees were shaking. He sat that way for hours as night fell. It suddenly occurred to him that the empty scattered tank cars and the miraculous logging of this lumber tract of giant fir in two days were somehow related.

Somewhere off in the distance came the low rumbling of distant thunder. Bjornsen shivered and stalked off to his car.

The moon rose over the mountains, shedding a mellow silver light over the level area where a forest had been. Beyond the mountains, in the shelter of a gigantic cave, Paul Bunyan and Babe, the big blue ox, slept. Their snores were the sounds of distant thunder in a cloudless sky.

Babe slept with the peace of one whose stomach is well filled. But not so Paul Bunyan.

He twitched and turned and mumbled. His hands made chipping motions and upon his rugged face was a broad smile.

Paul Bunyan was dreaming.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

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TEARS FOR THE CROCODILE

By Lee Francis

What could a beautiful girl have in common with the murderous snake god?

PROFESSOR BRADY'S thoughts were bordering on desperation. He stood head and shoulders above the group of bushmen, the sun beating down on his pith helmet, perspiration running off his stubbled chin. The little aborigines moved in about him as tightly as possible. They listened as he struggled to get across his point.

"White men go long way Lake Tanganyika," he pronounced the words with deliberation. He had to convince some of them that they should co-operate with him. "One guide—two guide—give plenty beads—much cloth—good money. How many guide?"

He waited, knowing that they would not answer. Something, and he thought that something was fear, prevented any of these beady-eyed little people from stepping forward.

"Much beads—much money," he repeated.

White dust arose from the village square, darkening his wet face. He smiled at them, trying to hide his doubts. This village had been the same as the other.

He and Pete Larson had a date at Tanganyika. It wasn't the type of hunting he usually did. Captain Pete Larson promised him bigger game.

"*Dear Prof,*" Pete's message had said, "*pull yourself loose from that village of yours and meet me in Usumbura in three days. I need your knowledge of the lake to track down a man. Erick Mueller, German prisoner of war has escaped and is hiding out in the brush. I'll depend on you.*"

Brady had made his way toward Tanganyika, for he was at home in his own section. Now, with jungle swamps ahead, he needed men who could get him through. Some of the bushmen, feeling that they had heard Brady's complete speech, were breaking away from the group. They drifted toward the mud-walled palm-thatched huts that surrounded the square.

Brady's throat was dry. It was almost noon. The sun beat down upon him as though it also did not approve of him going further. He tried again:

"Give fine rifle warrior can guide me Tanganyika." He held his big game rifle aloft. He had another in his baggage, "much beads."

The sight of the rifle brought gleams of interest into the eyes of several of the men. Still, they drifted from him as he stepped into their midst. He was growing angry. The heat did that to a man. Suddenly the little savages looked stubborn to him. He raised his voice, shouting at them:

"You God-damned unreasonable little midgets. *Isn't there a man among you?*"

A voice came from directly behind him. A soft feminine voice. He pivoted, startled at the sound.

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We seemed to sense the shadow of an evil monster as the native talked

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It was a white girl.

She stood there, legs spread apart, arms akimbo, smiling at him broadly.

Brady was no fool. He ruled three hundred square miles of bush country to the east. Ruled it with medicine and kindness. He'd visited every village in his own domain, and yet had never heard of a white girl living within five-hundred miles. But here she was.

The sun had burned her to a clean bronze. Her clothing was simple and, it seemed to him, impossible for such a place. It consisted of a white silk blouse, somewhat frayed at the bottom and hanging loosely over a red skirt of the same material. Long, curly chestnut hair encircled a beautiful pouting face.

"Remember your temper, Englishman," she said. "You must not lose it. My people might misunderstand."

For a moment his eyes remained wide and his mouth hung open in astonishment. Then he regained control of his speech.

"I say," he stammered, "where in Heaven's name?"

She shifted her pose slightly and the sun exposed the slim lines of her body.

"If you are going to ask about me," she suggested, "forget it. I live where I wish. You do the same. I don't ask your business here."

He had to admire her for that, though it left his face a little red.

"I know it's none of my business," he admitted, "but you—here with these —these . . .?"

"Savages," she said coolly. "They are quite kind and considerate of me. You wish to go to Tanganyika?"

QUESTIONS seethed inside him, but he recognized a worthy opponent and decided, at least for the present, to respect her words. He nodded.

"I've got to reach Usumbra in three days," he said.

"Why?"

He was about to answer that, but that also was none of her business.

Yet, she was treating him quite decently. Perhaps she could help. Should he tell her the real reason he had to meet Pete Larson? It would be best. These people were uncanny at detecting a lie. He would have to pay her every respect if he hoped to win her confidence.

"There's a war on," he said. "It seldom touches this remote part of the world, but when it does, we must fight in the best manner we know. A German prisoner of war has escaped from a camp far to the north. He's clever. He has reached Tanganyika and is hiding somewhere in the brush. I meet an American officer at Usumbra. Together we'll hunt down our man."

At the mention of American, her eyes flashed. A frown wrinkled her forehead. Then, without acknowledging his words, she walked past him, into the center of the crowd of pygmies. As she walked, she touched several of the men on the head.

Her voice became guttural and Brady recognized the Bantu dialect flowing from her lips. When she returned, five of the men followed her. They had taken a complete about face in their attitude toward Brady. The first, a wrinkled, leathery little fellow, grinned broadly as he faced the Professor.

"Name number one fella, Mambi." He pointed to himself. "Must hurry—you say three days. Must give much beads and *gun*."

He reached for Brady's gun and the Professor passed it over, staring at it as it rested in Mambi's hands, with a lingering love for something fine that has been sacrificed. The girl spoke to him in short, abrupt sentences.

"Take five men. Leave all but your important luggage. We must start at

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once."

"We?" he stammered. "You aren't going to enter the jungle, not dressed like that?"

Her feet were bare. Her toes dug up little mounds of warm dust as she moved about.

He stared at him a little scornfully.

"Why do you think my men are going?" she asked. "They wouldn't travel the Snake God country without me."

THE sun filtered down through age old trees, penetrating the dense foliage and the twisting vines. It was cooler here, but the swampy trail steamed with a different kind of heat. The rotting, degenerate earth gave up the stench of dying thing.

Mambi, leading his men, moved forward steadily, cutting and hacking his way through the undergrowth. Brady had time to wonder on that trip. Not once during the full three day trek did the girl falter or lag behind. She walked steadily, lightly, between the last carrier and Brady. She never turned and he had ample opportunity to watch and wonder.

When night came, Mambi built roaring fires and they slept with one man on guard, until the first rays of sunlight sent them onward.

Brady was at home in the jungle. Although this trail was strange to him, it tired him no more and no less than the others. The strength of the girl amazed him. Hour after hour, day after day, her slim legs carried her over rotting logs and waist deep through black swamp water. She spoke only when necessary, giving sharp reproachful orders to her men. Her smooth body held up under every strain and many times, the Professor was forced to puff a little breathlessly to keep up with her.

Who was she? Why did she refuse to volunteer information? Did she actually live throughout the year with the little people of the village?

CAPTAIN Pete Larson of the American Intelligence emerged from the thatched hut near the marsh and hurried across the native compound. He hesitated when the path led into a narrow trail, and then waited. His number one boy had told him a party of seven were on their way up the trail. Pete Larson had every reason to expect Professor Brady.

Larson saw dust rising from the burned top-soil where the trail wandered out of the jungle and up the hill to the village. He took off his helmet and wiped sweat from his face. He replaced the helmet quickly and returned the handkerchief to his pocket. Larson, to put it bluntly, was damned glad that Brady could come. He had been on Erick Mueller's trail for three months, and Mueller, thus far, showed every sign of escaping Africa and eventually returing to Germany where he would be able to divulge some important information.

The people on the trail came closer and Larson's smile turned to a frown as he saw a red skirt moving in the faint breeze.

"For Gawd's sake," he mumbled, "a woman."

He hadn't seen a white woman for a year. He started toward Brady's party. His tall, slightly stoop shouldered figure ambled easily over the rough ground. The grin of delight widened as he drew closer to them.

At last they were within hailing distance.

"Brady," he called, and broke into a run. "And a white woman. Man, this is wonderful."

Brady met him with outstretched hands.

"Guess I kept my word," he said.

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"There were a few bad hours when I thought I'd never get here."

He turned to the girl, as she came up to them, staring with ill concealed respect at Larson's tall figure.

"Leeta got some boys for me. I owe my punctual arrival entirely to her."

"Leeta?" Larson said, and grasped the girl's hand. "Your name is as pretty as you are. What's the rest of it?"

She shook her head and her hair tossed about in stray curls. Her teeth sparkled.

"That's all," she said. "Your professor insisted on a name. Leeta will do."

Brady interrupted.

"By the God's, Larson," he said. "You'd better not keep after her for more information. She's a little spitfire if you get too curious. A darned welcome one though, with the help she's given me."

LARSON tried to keep his eyes, his thoughts, off the girl as they hurried on to the shade of the village. A half hour later he had explained to Brady what lay ahead.

"Mueller is one of the top men in the Gestapo," he said. "He's been in a prison camp up north. I was detailed to bring him back and I almost nabbed him in this very village. He's slipped away again and I don't know the lay of the land south of here. I sent that note to you last week. A flyer dropped it off near your place, and paid a boy to run it in to you. That gives Mueller a six-day start."

They were fairly comfortable now. The chief of the village knew Brady and seemed to have great respect for Mambi and Leeta. They ate plentifully and as dusk fell, Larson was sure that Mueller could be apprehended with the help of his old companion.

As they talked, Leeta sat quietly, eating fruit that was brought to her.

"We'll need a couple of good boys and a guide," Brady said. "I wouldn't tackle this country alone."

"Mambi will go with you," Leeta offered. "I will go along also. I know the country of the Snake God very well."

Larson turned and studied her carefully. He had fought to keep his eyes off her. Now, with their plans made, he found it hard to remain silent.

"Look here, Leeta," he said. "I'll take Brady's advise and not ask too many questions. Remember, though, that you're a damned attractive girl. Why not volunteer some information? Surely you don't make a habit of running around the country with so little protection?"

To Brady's surprise the girl laughed. He realized that Larson was handsome enough to get a favorable reaction from most women. But from Leeta? She had hardly spoken ten words to him during the three days they were on the trail.

"Leeta will be the only name you'll ever know me by," she said. Then the smile vanished. A tiny frown took its place. "You will be very foolish if you let your heart rule your head. You may thank me for helping you and I will leave when we reach the end of Erik Mueller's trail."

Quite abruptly she arose. Darkness was closing in around the village. Out in the brush a lion roared its challenge. Leeta faded into the night. As she left, Mambi stood up and stalked after her.

Brady looked at Larson. The big American's face was a study.

"I'll be damned," he said softly. "I've know some exclusive numbers, but never anyone like her. She's ready to help us as long as she's needed and she's no more than a half-pint of woman. Ask her a single question about herself

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and she fades out of the picture in a hurry."

Brady sat silently for a long time. At last he reached for his bed roll, unstrapped it and arranged it close to the fire.

"Unprotected *perhaps*," he said thoughtfully, "but I doubt it. I have the impression that she knows exactly how to take care of herself." He added dryly: "Under any circumstances."

NINE days out of Usumbra. The country was covered with tall marsh grass and in a distance, Lake Tanganyika lay like a smooth burnished plate of copper. Constantly, throughout the day, Mambi found fresh signs of Erik Mueller's trail. At times they seemed very close, then, when both Larson and Brady were ready to close in, Mueller's trail was lost once more.

Leeta, as had been her custom, was sleeping well away from the campfire. Mambi, his leathery face wrinkled with importance, leaned forward close to the fire, talking in a low monotone.

Both Brady and Larson listened, so tired that they could not sleep. Their nerves had been worn to a raw edge.

"Number one woman strong medicine against Snake God," Mambi was explaining. "Snake God powerful in in this country. Snake God kill strange men who not b'long here. Strangle boys. Strangle white men."

"I'd like to see this creature for myself," Brady said. "I've heard the legend before. Men found with their bodies crushed and broken. Always it happens away from trees. Away from the jungle. At first I suspected there really was some huge killer snake, but the snake won't leave its tree. It certainly wouldn't come out into this open country."

A shudder coursed through Mambi's body.

"Number one white woman strong medicine," he repeated, as though to reassure himself. "You have no fear."

Larson smiled a little ruefully.

"Strong medicine is right," he said. "I can't get next to her, because she'd probably tear my eyes out. Darned if I'm not taken with the little devil."

Brady didn't know why, but he worried much that night about Larson's words. He had seen Leeta's eyes on Larson as they followed the trail. Her eyes were bright, and it seemed to him, a little frightened.

IT was late in the afternoon of the tenth day out of Usumbra. Pete Larson led the party. They were close to Erich Mueller. Mueller has passed the last water hole scarcely an hour before. The German was near his trail's end. Brady was more concerned about Larson at that moment than he was over the capture of the German.

Then, ahead of him he saw Larson drop flat in the tall grass. He motioned for the others to take cover. Leeta, panting slightly, dropped beside Brady. Thoughtlessly he put his arm on her wrist. It was a friendly, protecting gesture. She withdrew it quickly and her eyes caught his with a gleam of utter fright as her body went rigid.

Events piled up so fast that he had little time to wonder at the gesture. Larson crawled back slowly and his face was in grim lines.

"Your Snake God, Brady," he said. "You wanted to see it."

He heard Leeta gasp and turned to see the anger that blazed in her eyes. Suddenly all beauty seemed to drain from her. There was a satanical fury on her face.

"Not—a—real snake?" Brady stammered.

"I can't be sure. It's curled around the body of a man. Mueller, I think."

It was like the end of a bad dream,

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that sentence.

Together they moved forward on hands and knees, until their post commanded a view of the small open gully ahead. Leeta followed them and the three stared down at the scene below.

"It's Mueller, all right," Larson said, and studied the secene with his glasses. He passed the glasses to Brady. "Take a good look at that snake."

Brady put the glasses to his eyes. He saw what appeared to be a huge reptile, nearly fifty feet long. The glasses, however, revealed that it was only the skin of snakes stretched over a long column of squatting, crawling natives. As he watched, the human snake writhed and wound its way tightly around the figure of Erick Mueller. Mueller had been trussed by vines. Now the human snake arose and poised over him. Eager, glistening arms grasped the ropes and started to pull.

To Brady's horror, the ropes cut into Mueller's flesh and the man was literally torn apart with the force of the rope-vines being drawn clean through his flesh.

He turned to see Larson's eyes still on the scene. Leeta, at Larson's side, watched also. Her face was quite expressionless, and betrayed no emotion.

"We—we'd better get out of here," Brady said, "before they start looking for more victims."

Larson nodded. For some time he didn't speak. Then he shrugged his shoulders and started to edge his way backward.

"It looks as though Mueller had been paid off in full," he said. "Let's go."

THEY would make a speedy march back to Usumbra. Larson lay awake a long time that night. He wasn't worried any more about Erick Mueller. He could report his mission accomplished. Tonight, Leeta was uppermost on his mind.

He was sure that his was no foolish, sudden infatuation brought on by months away from civilization. It wasn't the mystery of Leeta either that troubled him. To Pete Larson, the explanation was simple. He loved the girl and he didn't care where she came from or what she'd done. The main thing was to convince her that he wasn't a bad bargain. Thus far he hadn't had the courage to approach her again.

It was a cool night. The wind in the grass sang a song in his ears.

Then he saw the slim, shadowy form creeping near the fire. At once, he was alert, hand on the pistol under his bed roll. The shadow came closer.

It was Leeta.

She was quite close. He could her her breathing.

Lying very still, he closed his eyes and waited. She came directly to his side. He wanted to take her in his arms, but he didn't dare.

Then as suddenly as she had come she was gone again. This time she had arisen to her feet and run swiftly into the darkness beyond the edge of the camp.

His lips were still warm with the heat of the single, desperate kiss she had pressed against them.

That kiss had been a gesture of parting! She had promised to stay *as long as she was needed.*

He had to find out what sent her running from him. He was sure of her love.

He strapped on his cartridge belt hurriedly and ran in the direction she had gone. He wasn't sure, but he thought he saw movement among the boys. Footsteps sounded faintly behind him.

Without looking back, Larson ran faster, trying to follow the faint trail her feet made where the grass bent,

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allowing her to pass.

It was very dark and the marks were faint. He was sure that someone was on his trail, but that didn't matter. He plunged forward, frightened that she might escape him forever.

Then, abruptly, he stopped. The trail had stopped also. In its place, the grass was broken down and pushed aside, as though a huge beast had lurked here. Where the trail widened, he saw something shining in the grass. He bent over and picked up two bits of silk. Leeta's blouse and skirt.

Mambi, for it was the number one boy who followed him, found Larson standing there in the darkness, the clothing in his hand, gazing ahead with dull frightened eyes. Mambi tried hard to make Larson return to camp.

"Number one white woman say she leave you when bad fella reached long time end trail," Mambi explained carefully. "You not try follow. You be sorry."

Larson wasn't in the mood to be placated.

"You're a damned heathen," he snapped. "Either you help me track down the killer that got her, or I go alone. You go?"

Mambi had respect for this white man. He also had a responsibility.

"I go," he said, and started off on a dog trot.

THE trail was easy to follow. It lead back along the way they had come. It was still visible at daylight, a wide, crushed trail of grass going straight back toward the scene of the Snake God's fiendish killing.

As they drew closer, Mambi lagged, as though frightened of what was waiting for them. When they reached the clearing where Mueller had died, Larson knew why. The Snake God was gone. In its place were the shredded torn bodies of the men who had hidden under the skins of reptiles. The same gigantic creature that had caught Leeta had passed this way. The trail of blood that it left was not a pleasant sight.

Here, alone with the pygmie who had come to protect him, Pete Larson faced the truth, and the bitterness that it brought him. Alone by the fire with the dried up number one boy of Brady's party, Larson heard the story of the Snake God.

"Many suns pass," Mambi said softly, "and all time bad men of Lake Tanganyika worship Snake God. They dress in skins of snake and kill all who go this way.

"Our village fear Snake God. All villages fear Snake God. Then one day number one white woman come from long way and live among us. After that no one fear Snake God. Number one white woman you call Leeta have strange power against Snake God."

He paused and stared behind him into the darkness.

"Then one day Mambi see giant crocodile kill Snake God. After many day, Mambi follow number one white woman and see many Snake Gods die."

"But a crocodile," Larson protested. "Good Lord man, a crocodile can't destroy fifty or sixty men."

Mambi nodded soberly.

"All time kill many men. Always bad men who would kill women—babies—in many village, if they not killed first."

"And Leeta had to run straight into the jaws of this—this monster." Larson leaned forward with his head on his hands. "I could have stopped her."

"Number one white man not know yet why woman you call Leeta run away?"

Larson looked up, wonder in his eyes. He shook his head slowly. Mambi

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looked very unhappy.

"Then white man not know that woman you call Leeta is Crocodile God? That Crocodile God is good spirit and is broken hearted because she is so ugly?"

A shudder coursed through Larson's body. He was unable to speak. He could only stare at the little man, hoping that the whole thing was a nightmare. Hoping that Mambi was mistaken or trying hopelessly to make him feel better over Leeta's loss.

"You're—you're crazy," he said hoarsely. It wasn't his own voice. "Leeta was human. She loved me. She—she kissed me before she ran away."

Mambi nodded.

"I watched her lose heart to you," he said slowly. "I knew her thoughts. *'Love for white man cannot last. White man must not grow to cherish my heart. My heart cannot be his. It can only bleed with unhappiness.'*

"That is what Leeta think. Tonight she must go away. Long time ago she make herself look like white woman. Then, when she grow to love white man, she can only remain white woman until her people need her again. Tonight we need her. She go, but first, with wet eyes, she give you one kiss. She never dare look like white woman again."

He had finished his explanation. The night was much the same. The wind still sighed endlessly through the waving grass. The fire died down and Mambi added fresh fuel.

Larson sat quietly. He tried desperately to understand.

"Africa!" he muttered to himself. But that didn't explain it either. Africa never explained her mysteries. . . .

THE END

THE LONE STAR-GAZER

By J. R. CANFIELD

ON FORTY acres of land near Delphos, Ohio, lives a great man. His name is Leslie C. Peltier, and he will be remembered after most of the men now living will be forgotten. Scientists know him today as the world's greatest amateur astronomer. Peltier has probably recorded more observations of the mysterious variable stars than any other living man. He discovered and recorded at least one new star never before charted by mankind. In 1925 his sharp eyes and four-inch telescope picked out a comet that had remained hidden from the world's mightiest telescopes. Since that time he has been the discoverer or co-discoverer of at least seven comets.

The man, Peltier, does not adequately fill a scientist's shoes. He is far from the "scientist type." His education was scanty; he never finished high school. Isolated on his parent's small Ohio farm, he had few, if any, contacts with the scientific world. In his early boyhood he was presented with a copy of A FIELD BOOK OF THE STARS, by the late William Tyler Olcott, then of the Harvard faculty. It was his mother's Christmas gift to him which opened the new vistas for this ambitious and imaginative child.

Leslie C. Peltier was thrilled with his gift. He read the book from cover to cover, found the style clear and easily understandable. There he found an explanation of the workings of the solar system a description of the meaning of many of the countless suns beyond it, and best of all, a sky chart which made it possible for him to identify many of the brighter stars at a glance.

With the chart at his side Peltier spent long hours out in an open field matching the stars in the sky with those mapped for him. His thirst for knowledge grew as the days went by. In his clumsy scrawl he wrote to Professor Olcott and was told that a telescope would be of great help to him; he might even become an observer of variable stars.

When the boy found out that the cheapest telescope he could buy that would answer his purpose cost eighteen dollars, he became discouraged. Then, luckily, the strawberry season rolled around, and he was able to earn the needed sum of money. After picking nine hundred quarts at two cents a quart, Peltier had enough to purchase the two-inch telescope. Without delay he sent for it, and from the day it arrived it was constantly in use. From sunset to sunrise he lay on his back in a meadow while the new telescope broadened the universe beyond his wildest dreams. Now he was able to distinguish the countless individual suns which made up the Milky Way. Vega, the brightest star visible in the northern hemisphere,

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changed from a mere point of light into a brilliant white diamond. Now all four moons which swing around the planet Jupiter could be seen. The amazing rings which form a belt 179,000 miles in diameter around the giant planet Saturn came into view.

With the arrival of the telescope, Peltier's observations assumed a real importance. He wasted little time after that on haphazard star-gazing. On a fence post near his home he built a swivel arrangement to hold his telescope and sent to Harvard for charts issued by the Association of Variable Star Observers. With a patience befitting a man far older than he Leslie would work on every clear and moonless night recording his observations of variables.

Variable stars are those whose brilliance is not constant. The eternal ebb and flow of their light constitutes one of the major mysteries of the heavens. Leslie Peltier has charted and sent to Harvard more than fifty-thousand observations of variables. This contribution, astronomers agree, is in itself as important to science as his sensational discoveries of new comets.

In addition to his nightly studies of the solar system through his two-inch lens, Leslie had to help his father with the farm work. Meanwhile he devoured every book on astronomy in the town library and sent away for others.

The results of his untiring labor, the observations which he had sent to Harvard, were well received. In 1919, officials of the Harvard observatory asked Leslie if he wanted a four-inch telescope; the University offered to lend him one. Leslie, of course, accepted gladly and his universe was again widened by millions of light years.

One very important factor in Leslie Peltier's success was the encouragement he received from his parents. They were simple country people, but they realized the immense value the progress of their son's work was adding to science. At a cost of less than one hundred dollars Leslie and his father built a crude observatory with a nine foot revolving dome to house the new telescope. For two years more Leslie concentrated only on variables. Then in 1921 his work entered a new phase.

Leslie Peltier started searching for comets. Many men have spent lifetimes searching the skies for these unpredictable bodies. For four years Peltier's endeavors bore no fruit. But on the bitterly cold night of November 13, 1925, he detected a new object in his sights. It appeared as an uncharted tiny point of fuzzy light deep in the western sky. At first he was afraid to believe what he found. Too often, he knew, mistakes could be made. What appears to be a comet is many times just a faint nebula. So patiently Peltier waited to check and recheck what he had seen. In an hour he looked at the "fuzz" again. It had moved! He was almost positive now that he had made a real discovery.

It was a comet tearing across the sky at a terrific speed. Peltier rushed to the door of his cold little observatory to the nearest phone and put in a hurried call.

That discovery of a comet brought Peltier letters from distinguished professional astronomers throughout the world. He was awarded a medal by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. Tourists flocked to his observatory. But Peltier's work did not end here. He continued searching, finding, and charting comets. Discoveries in 1930, 1932, and 1933 brought him a finer telescope, a six-inch instrument loaned by Princeton University and especially designed for comet hunting.

Later discoveries,—the new star, Nova Lacertae, and the greatest comet since Halley's, brought more fame to this diligent searcher of the heaven's. These two famous finds were made in 1936. The giant comet is thought to measure between 10,000 and 100,000 miles in diameter, and was seen racing through space only 16,000,000 miles from our earth. This is a closer approach than is made by any other heavenly body except the moon and a couple of asteroids.

For the Comet of 1936 Peltier was again presented with a medal. He was called to Harvard and feted there by the nation's foremost stargazers. As soon as possible he stepped out of the public eye and returned to his telescope to chart more heavenly bodies, to gaze once more at the limitless expanse above.

Such was his love for the stars.

DISSECTING LIGHT

By GALE STEVENS

OF ALL the perplexing problems that face men of science today it is certain that the one which has caused them the greatest number of intellectual headaches is the problem of the nature of light. It seems strange to us who contact this everyday phenomena continually that it should so confuse and bewilder the greatest scientific minds alive. Our experience with it simply involves the exposing daylight and the button that turns on the reading lamp. It is there and that is all there is to it!

But is it? How many of us would be stumped by the naive question, "What is light?" If we turned to the dictionary we would find a definition that tells us it is the "opposite of darkness" or "radiant energy which, by its action upon the organs of vision, enables them to perform their function of sight." Even such a definition, however, is seriously lacking for it only tells us what light does and not what it is.

We begin to appreciate the complexity of this seemingly simple problem when we turn to the

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history of science. At various times through the ages different theories of light have been expounded, few of which have withstood the test of time. In the 20th century certain studies have been made which lead us toward the truth.

Just as sound is the mental interpretation of sound waves, so light is the interpretation which the brain makes of certain types of waves which fall upon the retina of the eye. There are sound waves too long or too short for the human ear to respond to; some animals with other types of ears which are tuned to different wave lengths can hear sounds to which human ears are totally deaf. High pitched dog whistles are an example of the application of this idea. We find the same principle applying to radiation. The human eye is a radio receiver tuned to a definitely limited range of wave lengths, while the range of electromagnetic waves is so unlimited that it is almost unbelievable. We see a very small fraction of the seven known types of electromagnetic radiations which bombard us from all sides.

Radio waves are the longest; some of them reach several miles in length. Below these come the heat or infra-red rays, invisible to the eye but detectable by a delicate thermometer or by the sensation of warmth. These infra-red rays begin with red light and end with violet light with a wave length of thirty-nine hundred-thousandths of a centimeter. Then in order come the ultra-violet rays, the X-rays, the gamma rays of radium, and finally the cosmic rays. The last named are the infinitely infinitesimal rays which measure two thousand-billionths of a centimeter in length!

The controversy over the nature of light has raged for three hundred years. Newton and the early scientists thought of light as a stream of particles thrown out from a luminous source. This explanation was born largely from the observed characteristics of light to travel in a straight line, like bullets from a machine gun. Newton called it "the corpuscular theory of light."

This explanation, however, was confronted with serious difficulties which could not be overcome. When a ray of light falls on water part of it is refracted and part reflected from the water's surface. How then could this be true if light was a succession of particles? The water should refract all of the rays. Newton's reply, that the surface of the water had alternate "fits of reflection and refraction" was held as unsatisfactory by other scientists, and this theory was discarded.

This hypothesis was followed by the theory that light was analogous to water ripples distributed from a central source somewhat in the same fashion as you might create waves by disturbing the water with a stick. According to this theory, the sun distributes energy through space in the forms of radiation possessing the properties of a succession of waves.

The wave-theory of light brought its own difficulties with it. While it explained some things that Newton's theory left unanswered, it could not clarify certain other observed phenomena which the corpuscular theory readily demonstrated. A scientific wit urged his colleagues to solve this conflict by using the wave theory on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and the other hypothesis on the alternating days.

The most recent answer to this knotty problem was made by Professor Max Planck. The quantum theory, as it is called, offers to cure the wave theory of light of its defects. Next to Einstein's theory of relativity, it is considered the outstanding achievement of twentieth century science. It shows that Newton was not wholly wrong in regarding radiation as corpuscular, and that a beam of light has the characteristics ascribed to it by both the corpuscular theory and the wave principle of more recent times.

This hypothesis, simply stated, suggests that scientists adopt the idea that energy is released in little driblets or bundles, which Planck called "quanta." He contends that a radiating body gives off its energy in these little bundles of force or quanta. They are not all the same size; they vary with the frequency of the particular type of radiation of which they are a part. Each quantum is equal to a certain universal constant of nature multiplied by the frequency of its radiation. This mysterious constant is known simply by the letter "h," and it is now explained as a unit of action or energy multiplied by time.

Although in practical life there is no such theory as energy multiplied by time, this surprising conception of "h" is not so strange in the four dimensional world of Einstein. There it is conceived of as a kind of atom; not the atom of matter which modern scientists tend to question, but rather a quantum of the more elusive unit of action.

This theory, with its explanation of radiation as both corpuscular and wave, seems to challenge seriously our belief in the uniformity of nature. Researchers have even discovered that not only radiation but all electrons and protons, the fundamental units of which all matter is composed, can appear at certain times as particles, and at other times as waves. A duality on the nature of all matter seems to have been established. Whether or not man ultimately is destined to unlock this innermost secret of nature, at least he is certain of having turned within recent years one more corner into the road leading to entirely new conceptions of nature's ways of working.

ONE WAY TO KEEP OUR VICTORY WON
BUY VICTORY BONDS

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READER'S PAGE

ATOMIC ENERGY

Sirs:

I've just heard over the radio about the new atomic bomb made from Uranium. In the *Fantastic Adventures* of July, 1942, the story "The Mystery of Shaft 13" written by Robert Moore Williams has to deal with atomic power perfected in 1945!

STANLEY MERMELSTEIN,
627 Powell St.,
Brooklyn 12, New York.

Yes, our authors seem to have the power of prophecy, but this has been demonstrated so often that we no longer make a fuss over it. We only ask that you consider the possibility that these authors are continuing their uncanny work, and that the stories published today are just as capable of becoming tomorrow's realities.—ED.

TRULY A MASTERPIECE

Sirs:

I must comment on J. W. Pelkie's "King Of The Dinosaurs." On only one other occasion did a long novel really hold my interest. That story was "Taggart's Terrible Turban." But now I have read a novel that is truly a masterpiece. A fantasy within a fantasy, full of action, fast and witty—I do believe I could go on and on! You must ask Mr. Pelkie where he got his idea for the berries. It was terrific. And to top it off, dinosaurs who play baseball. A tribute to our national game.

HOWARD SCHAVLAN,
680 E. 235th St.,
Bronx 66, New York.

We KNEW you'd like it!—ED.

REALLY SCORED!

Sirs:

You really scored in the October FA! Haven't seen an issue like it for a long time—even in *Amazing Stories*. I'll admit I've been neglecting *Fantastic Adventures*, but now I'm going to make it a point not to miss it any more. Here are my opinions as to the ratings of the "super" yarns in this issue: 1—"Dummy Of Death" by Leroy Yerxa. This one did not just sneak the top honors from Pelkies story, it yanked 'em away! My whole reaction to it can be said in one syllable . . . Brrr! 2—"King Of The Dinosaurs" by J. W. Pelkie. Keep up the good work, Joe! I can hardly wait for those other two you've sold to FA. 3—"Through A Dead Man's Eyes" by Geoff St. Reynard. Wonderful! Another chiller, just like the Dummy, I mean Delbert. 4—"Fingerprints Of Fear" by Richard Casey and "Bag And Baggage" by William Lawrence Hamling. These two are absolutely tied. In fact, all the five stories are good for first. Both these last two were highly original and refreshing. I wish you could fill that twice-as-thick new issue you promised with yarns this good.

ROBERT WIRTH,
4432 Parker Ave.,
Chicago 39, Illinois.

You just wait and see! We expect very soon to get that paper, and the printers (both are a problem as yet) to give you that big issue—but we've already got the yarns!—ED.

MAYBE WE'LL END WAR NOW!

Sirs:

Some months ago I wrote a fan letter to your *Fantastic Adventures* magazine, which you published. Through it I got to writing to a soldier in Europe. He was the best pen pal anyone could wish for and I did enjoy his letters so very much, but he was killed by Wilcox's pigs. Now, if I may, I would like to take advantage of your magazine to try to find someone to sorta take his place.

I would like also to thank you for your wonderful reply to Sgt. Knowles of Canada in reference to his dislike of Wilcox picturing our enemies as pigs. Trying to control my dislike of people who can't and won't realize how bestial our foes are I will say it is that type of person who should be in the very front lines. Thanks again, Ed. and you just keep in there pitching for our boys who have died for the right of us poor humans against the rights of such animals.

MARJORIE BRUNO,
101 E. Ave. 38,
Los Angeles 31, Calif.

Well, the war's over now, and its last "present" to us is the atomic bomb. It WILL end war! We say this with two possibilities in mind, (1) that its very threat will convince governments of the futility of fighting—it is governments that start wars, you know, and not people—and (2) that it will be used in its full power in a coming war that will end civilization as we know it. Faced with such a catastrophe, these humans remaining alive would have war's lesson forever before them in their return to the caveman era. God grant that won't happen!—ED.

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STORIES of the STARS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Aldebaran, In Taurus

This first magnitude star is one of the most fascinating objects in the heavens, known to man through many ages

TECHNICALLY, Aldebaran is an enormously interesting heavenly object. It is a part of the constellation, Taurus; its magnitude is 1.1; its right ascension is 4.5; its declination is plus 16.4; it is on Meridian at 8 P. M. on January 26; its radial velocity is plus 55.1. All of which will give you some idea of where it is—if you are an astronomer. Additional astronomical data: it is a Class K star, which means it is one of the lower temperature stars—of 4,000 degrees C. can be called low! That's about the temperature of the umbrae of sun spots. The compound titanium oxide is strongly present in its spectrographic lines. It is 54 light years distant, and is 91 times as bright as our own sun. It is 31 million miles in diameter, and its volume is 55,000 times that of old Sol.

In a legendary sense, Aldebaran is in the midst of a small group of stars called the Hyades. The most-heard story is that they were nymphs, daughters of Atlas and nurses of Dionysus, placed in the sky by Zeus. These stars are frequently called the Rainy Hyades. This was because their rising with the sun was coincidental with the rainy season in the Mediterranean region. However, Aldebaran is the blazing eye of the bull, Taurus, as he charges down upon Orion. It was this bull, says legend, who was really Jupiter who changed himself so as to carry away Europa from Phoenicia to the island of Crete, where she became the mother of Minos, and the grandmother of Deucalion, the Noah of Greek mythology. Taurus, however, is older than the Greek, appearing as Apis in ancient Egypt, and in the ancient astronomy of Chaldea and India. The bull was the symbol of very ancient religion which was fostered by a false "god" from a plane of existance related to exist in what science today calls the Ether. It was said that human beings, after their death, became inhabitants of realms far away from earth, and sometimes returned to set up dictatorial "godships" on earth, and enslave Earth's humans. The placing of these legends symbolically in the heavens as stars and clusters of stars and constellations such as Taurus, is thus seen to originate in the dim antiquity of as much as 50,000 years ago, among races which today we know very little about, but who built many of the mysterious super-ancient ruins which so baffle our plodding acheologists. Much of the dogma of present-day religions comes from these incredibly ancient sources.

Artist Frank R. Paul, in painting his conception of what life might be like on a planet circling this giant red sun, does not consider these angles in his creation of a very primitive form of life—but he does take into consideration the fact that the sun is capable of providing light and warmth and life to a world that might conceivably be in the state Earth was 50,000 years ago (beg pardon, you geologists!) when the giant reptiles, the dinosauria, roamed the swamplands of a youthfully steaming earth.

He has pictured a space ship from earth having landed on this primitive planet, and found, (here in subtle confirmation of an early legend of giant men on the earth at the time of the dinosaurs) eighteen foot humans contesting for supremacy with the towering reptiles whom they will eventually wipe out (if their history goes as Earth's did). These humans are regarding our heroes in much the same awe that our own giant prototypes might have regarded the visit of those "superhuman" beings from the "Ether" who came to earth to set up our early religions, or rather, our earliest dictatorships and slavestates, whose horror is remembered in Man's designation of the constellations.

Using the atomic weapons now possible, these earthmen are "slaying the dragon" ala Apollo, and thereby incurring the respect and worship of the giant, but savage and unthinking humans of the planet. How easy to become a god!

In the background we see that the giant savages were not enemies to all the reptiles, but had actually tamed and subjugated certain types to use as beasts of burden and as steeds.

Mighty Aldebaran, flaming redly in the sky, dominates the scene, and (science now agrees) sends down her warlike rays to affect the minds and bodies of the inhabitants of the planet. Red is the color of war, of savagery, of conflict, and science today is learning, therapeutically, what can be done with color, both in destroying and in healing. This giant sun would fill most of the sky with its bulk, and would, perhaps, hide the rest of the stellar bodies from view because of the giant flames that would sweep out to obscure them.

Mr. Paul has ably (more so than he has realized) depicted here how the life of a world can be dominated by its environmental conditions. The red star, Aldebaran, can only produce such results as Mr. Paul has shown. Gradually scientific knowledge is advancing to these obvious conclusions.

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There are two funny things about Wilmer

The first is Wilmer's getup.

The second is that he doesn't care if he *does* look like a castoff scarecrow.

Because Wilmer's a lot smarter than he looks. While he's making more than he's ever made before, the dough he'd spend for a fancy wardrobe goes right smack into War Bonds . . . and for this Uncle Sam is mighty proud of him.

Naturally, you don't have to look like Wilmer . . . or tramp around in rags . . . to make your country proud of you, and your own future a whole lot more secure.

All you have to do is keep getting those War Bonds—and then forgetting them till they come due. Not bad—that four dollars for every three, and the safest investment in the world!

Why not get an *extra* War Bond today?

BUY ALL THE BONDS YOU CAN...
KEEP ALL THE BONDS YOU BUY

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

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STORIES OF THE STARS . . . ALDEBARAN

This star is in the constellation Taurus. It is 54 light years away from us and is 91 times as bright as our sun. It is 31 million miles in diameter. It is called the "Red Star". See page 178 for details

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